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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE CHARGE IS MURDER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

It looked like just another bustling little factory — until a man went in there to find justice, and found Death instead. They had given Mike Shayne one night to probe the grim secret of the place that peddled Murder.

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"THE CHARGE IS MURDER"

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Was it a bustling little business plant—or an incredible death trap? They had given Mike Shayne one bullet-marked night to probe the grim secret of the place where men went in smiling—and were carried out feet first . . .



THE DARK MAN struggled with terrible desperation. He wanted to scream, but the big one with the hare-lip had him by the throat. Big hairy hands with long, powerful fingers exerted a vise like pressure which constricted the breathing passage and almost crushed his Adam's apple. The fat man in back of him had his arms pinioned in a bearlike grip.

The dark man wasn't a skilled fighter anyway. If he had been, he might still have had a chance. The killers were hurried and careless,

but the dying man couldn't take advantage of that. He twisted and struggled and tried to kick and scream, and burned up the little oxygen left in his lungs.

Then his eyes and tongue protruded. His face turned a purplish black. Suddenly the man was dead.

The two killers went on strangling the corpse for a full two minutes before they recognized that the end had come. When they did, they both let go at once so that the body tumbled limply onto the bare concrete floor of the big warehouse.

**THE NEW COMPLETE
MIKE SHAYNE
SHORT NOVEL**



The two stood over the body, gasping for breath and wiping sweat from their faces. Killing is sweaty work in the humid heat of Miami.

"We shouldn't of done it, Jack," the fat man said when he could catch his breath. "I never meant somebody should get killed. I ain't no killer."

Hare-lip spat on the crumpled body. "You mean you wasn't no killer," he said and laughed. "You are now and it don't make no difference what your druthers are."

"I didn't mean nothing like this. It was an accident. Wasn't it, Jack?"

"No," Jack Turner told him. "No. It wasn't no accident. It was a execution, and you know it. You know good as me that we had it to do. Tony there" — he kicked the corpse — "was having a bad attack of honesty. He would of gone to the boss. In a business like ours that kind of attack has got to be fatal. You know that well enough, Bob, so you better cut out that stupid snivelling."

Fat Bob Foerster looked as if he was going to weep at any moment. "I dunno. I wish we hadn't. I wish we hadn't. Now what we gonna do with him? The rest of the crew will be coming in soon."

Hare-lip Turner bent down and grabbed the corpse's wrists. "You take his feet and help," he said. "Go on, Fatso, he won't bite. I got a idea where we can put him at least till after dark tonight."

THE HIALEAH TRASH and Garbage Disposal Truck was already a day off schedule. Usually they hit the Banner Appliance Company warehouse at least two or three days late, but this time there had been accumulated beefs from the customers, and work had been speeded up from the top down. Extra men were hired and the pace of the work accelerated.

The truck pulled into the back of the Banner Warehouse and one of the helpers pulled open the lid of the trash chute that projected from the wall at roughly second-story height. As usual gravity pushed the mass of former cartons, pine slats, shredded paper stuffing and assorted garbage out of the chute into the body of the huge truck. The driver pulled away at once.

Half an hour later one of the temporary help noticed a shoe in the mess of stuff piled in the truck. It looked to be in good condition, and he decided to add it to the sack of salvage he'd already collected.

When he got his hand on the shoe and pulled, it didn't come free. It took a minute for him to realize there was a foot inside. His yell stopped the truck and brought the driver out of the cab.

IN THE HIALEAH police morgue Sergeant of Detectives Finnerty contemplated the corpse with disgust.

"I swear I don't know what we're coming to, Pat," he told the Coroner's man. "You'd think they'd at

least try to hide a murder instead of just putting the body in the trash like an empty cigarette pack."

"Times have changed since you and I were young, Finnerty," the man agreed. Then: "In case it matters I think this was an amateur job. The neck's all crushed and he must of taken a long time to die. A pro would of used a wire and made it quick and neat."

"Of course it matters," Finnerty said. "Only trouble is that as of now it don't really help none. We got no idea who he is yet. Worse, we don't even know who dumped him. If them lazy bums on the truck paid any attention to business, but they don't. They're supposed to watch what they load. A real joke. One day they'll bring in a live hippo and want to know what to do with it."

"He looks like a Cuban," Pat suggested.

"Yeah, and his clothes are the sort they give away on this end of the airlift. If that's it, the folks at the reception center will have his prints. While we wait for that I got young Robinson back tracking every pickup stop on that route and asking are they missing a man. Sooner or later we got to find out something. We always do."

IN CONTRAST to the warehouse the executive suites at Banner were air conditioned and decorated in expensive neo-modern style. The wall-to-wall carpeting was deep-piled



and expensive, and the oversize desks were real hand-rubbed mahogany. There was a genuine oil painting on the wall of the office where Hare-lip Turner stood and shuffled his feet and twisted hands he wanted to stuff in his pockets and didn't quite dare.

"It was all we could think of to do," he said in a low tone. "After all we didn' have no time for thinking."

"Thinking?" the man back of the desk said in acid tones. "No. I wouldn't say you did much thinking. Not what anybody but a cretin would call thinking, that is. Of course you had to silence the man as soon as you realized what he was up to. That part of it couldn't be helped. You ought to have managed it by yourself though. Who did you say was the man who helped you?"

"Fatso," Turner said. "Fatso Bob. You know, sir. He's safe enough. He's been in the caper since it be-

gan. Besides he's scared of what would happen to him. He won't talk."

"I don't like it," the executive said. "I don't like it at all. You can never tell what the scared ones will do. Beyond a certain point they stop being logical. Just as if the fear wiped parts of their brains blank. When a man stops being logical you can't know what he's going to do next. It's like dealing with a dangerous anthropoid ape. There isn't any viable communication."

"Fatso's okay. You don't have to worry. I know him. He ain't no anthrow-boy. Not nohow."

"It's not important that you trust the man. What's important is whether I trust him and that's something else again. I may have to tell you to shut him up for good."

"I might not like that."

"I sincerely hope you didn't actually like what you had to do this morning, Jack. Some things have to be done, but they don't have to be liked. You can think of that man as a friend—or as somebody who could send you to the death house in Raiford Prison if he gets frightened enough to babble just a little into the wrong ears."

"I dunno. I think he'll keep his mouth shut. He'd have to go to the chair with me. He won't forget that. Now how about the rest of the operation? Do we shut up shop for a while till things blow over?"

The executive didn't hesitate. "No. Of course we don't, because

there isn't any real reason to. Even if the body is found and traced to this plant, there's nothing to connect his death with you or me. We blame it on a prowler or a personal enemy of some sort. The man wasn't working with us. There's absolutely nothing at all to connect him to us or to the operation. Nobody has suspected anything so far. We go right on with business as usual."

Hare-lip shifted his big feet on the carpet. "Yeah. I guess I can see it your way. About the Cubano too. We just don't know nothing from nothing."

"Precisely."

On his way out Hare-lip Turner almost bumped into a pretty secretary on her way into the office.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said to the man behind the desk. "I don't like to bother you, but there's a young man outside who says he's with the Hialeah police. He wants to see someone about inspecting our personnel records, and since Mr. Banner, senior, hasn't come in yet, I thought that perhaps you—?"

"Why of course, Miss Miller," the man said. "Send him right in. You know we're always most happy to cooperate with the authorities. I'll see him even before I finish opening this morning's mail."

AT THE VEGETABLE counter of a downtown City of Miami chain supermarket a handsome young Cuban woman was just saying to her neighbor: "Yes. My Uncle Tonio

from Oriente Province got here safely last week. How he did eat the first couple days! Just like he never saw food before! Yes, he loves it here. Roberto already got him a job—in a warehouse out in Hialeah, where the racetrack is. All of us; we're sure happy about it."

"That's wonderful, Carmelita," the other woman said. "I know how happy you must be that he's made it to Los Estados Unidos. I pray the Holy Mother that my dear sister will be on the exit quota soon. Her coming here is all that we need to make the whole family rejoice."

"I will add my prayers to yours," Carmelita told her. "Such happiness should be for everyone."

II

THE MAN in the white Palm Beach suit and the new wide necktie said, "This is a very delicate situation, Mike." He leaned back in his swivel chair and looked out over the sparkling, sun smitten reaches of Biscayne Bay. From the fourteenth floor of one of Miami's newest and poshiest high rise office buildings it was a very spectacular sight indeed.

The big redhead with the rugged, intelligent face who sat at ease near the window was also enjoying the view, though it was greatly changed from the days he'd first seen the South Florida Gold Coast. He was Michael Shayne, private detective and recognized expert on the ways of Miami and its citizens. He was

on regular retainer to the giant insurance company represented by the man who had spoken.

"In fact," the man in white said then, "It's so very highly delicate we don't know exactly where to tell you to start or what to look for."

"Suppose for a starter you just tell it like it is," Shayne suggested. "Let me have whatever you've already got. Maybe I can make a suggestion then. You never know."

"I know that if anyone can it'll be you," Ben Roberts said. "So it's just a hunch on the company's part; but you know Pan International Insurance has developed what amounts to a sixth sense over the years. When a situation doesn't feel just exactly right to them they've learned to go ahead on the assumption there's something smelly. Nine out of ten times that turns out to be the case. This is one of those times they want you to check out."

"Give me some facts," Shayne said. "That's all I want is the facts."

"Facts, you'll have. For several years now Pan-In has done all the insuring for Banner Appliance, a big warehousing and wholesaling outfit in Hialeah. They carry most of the name brands, and do an annual volume of business in the millions of dollars. Not the best account Pan-In has here, but still a big one.

"Now a couple of days ago a body turned up in the load of trash on a Hialeah City pick-up truck. You heard right. On a trash truck.

It was finally identified as a Cuban exile, over here less than a week. Name of Antonio Cabeza. He worked for Banner. Matter of fact he'd just been hired."

"How'd he get in the waste truck?" Shayne asked.

Roberts said, "He was there because somebody put him there. That is they did after they finished strangling him to death. Coroner says no chance of suicide. There are finger bruises on his neck. Probably one man held him while another did the strangling. The local force backtracked the truck till they found where Tony was working — at Banner.

"The people there admitted they'd hired him right off. No argument about his working there. On the other hand they knew nothing at all about any killing. Swore it must have been done someplace else than on their property."

"Is there proof he came to work that day?" Shayne asked.

"That's one point. There isn't," Roberts said. "Tony's time card hadn't been punched. Of course he's a green hand and might have just not remembered to do it. On the other hand it could mean he was killed before the place opened and dumped some place else—just by chance into a truck that serviced his work place."

"You and I both know that's a thin story," Shayne said. "A good sharp defense attorney could make a real holiday with it in court."

"Sure he could," Roberts said. "Add in the fact that Tony hadn't been around long enough to make enemies in the warehouse. Certainly not to make anybody want to kill him. There's no reason anybody there would kill him anyhow—or so their men pointed out."

"Could he have stumbled on a prowler?"

"Two prowlers," Roberts reminded him. "It's not very likely, but it's barely possible. So is the suggestion that some old-country enemy recognized him on the street and decided to wind up a long time vendetta. Without a motive we can't even guess."

Shayne looked out the window to where the cruise ship from Nassau was coming in through Government Cut. "You want me to find out who killed him?"

"That, yes. But even more important we want to know just exactly why he was killed. That's the number one priority in this assignment. Somebody back at the Pan-In home office has a hunch there's a worm in the big red apple out at Banner. It's just possible Tony got to see or hear something he wasn't supposed to, and was scragged to keep him quiet."

"Oh, come on," Shayne said. "Isn't that pretty far-fetched? Is there any evidence that points that way? Otherwise I'd say you were scraping the underside of the bottom of the barrel."

"Maybe they are," Roberts said.

"I mean maybe we are, but if he was killed inside the place it wasn't just for kicks. Somebody had to have a reason. We want to know what that reason was, and we figure you're the man who can find out for us.

"You see the home office people were already unhappy about Banner even before Tony's corpse showed up in the garbage. We had a tip—from one of the accountants who certified the Banner annual statement. He felt there was something going on there.

"This man's a good cost accountant, one of the best in the business around here. His calling in was all the funnier because he hadn't actually found anything wrong. Nothing you could pin down and point to. He was playing a hunch. Of course that's one of the things we pay him for.

"The best he could put it was that the books were too good. It would have been natural to find a couple of figures just a little bit out of the way, or minor transactions he could call in question if only on a technicality. Those things happen with even the best bookkeepers. The ordinary, perfectly normal, usually harmless little foul-ups and snafus that can happen to anybody at all. It's one reason everybody uses an outside audit.

"In this case there was nothing out of the ordinary except there weren't any odd spots. He said it was if those books had been hand



tuned by experts just before he got to them. Either that or the company bookkeeper had been luckier than anyone has a mortal right to be."

"So, you people don't like perfection?" Shayne said and laughed. "I'll keep it in mind when I deal with you."

"I didn't say that," Roberts said. "I'm not sure it's what I actually meant either. Oh, hell, you know what I mean. Or do you? Maybe I don't myself."

"I think I do," Shayne said. "Any sort of crook has a tendency to overdue things—fix up three or four iron clad alibis for a time when an innocent man wouldn't have even one. That sort of thing."

"I'm glad you don't just assume we're all crazy," Roberts said, and sounded genuinely relieved. "Lots of people would have. We get to be awfully sensitive in our business though. Everybody seems to think

an insurance company's fair game for any sort of con game or shenanigan. After a while we'd suspect our own mothers in a matter of business."

"I better warn you I'm no accountant," Shayne said. "Lucy has to keep my own books. If it was up to me I'd never have a balanced check book from one year's end to the next. Those books could be as phony as a cardboard pizza and I'd never know."

"That's okay," Roberts told him. "The books are our responsibility. We'll get to them again if we have to frame up a reason. What we want you to do is tell us what to look for. Start with the dead man. What could he have stumbled on that was so hot he had to be killed for knowing? If he found it by accident in a couple of days it must be out in the open. That sort of thing's what makes you worth your fees to us, Mike."

"Can do," Shayne said. "If it's there I'll dig it up. That is unless they bury it real deep because of the killing. You realize though that I might come up with an answer that doesn't fit in with your theory. It could be old Tony's death had nothing to do with the place he worked. Everything else in there may be just as proper as a Sunday school picnic."

"If it is I'll eat my hat," Roberts said, "but it could be. If that's what you find, you tell us and we'll be happy to get the news."

"First of all," the big detective said, taking out a small pocket loose-leaf and preparing to take notes, "suppose you give me a rundown on the cast of characters up there. Then I'd like any thoughts you have on the sort of thing that might be going on."

Roberts passed him a folder full of papers. "This is our make on the Banner people. You'll notice three of the top jobs are right in the family. Joe Banner, senior, is president and chairman of the board. Joe junior is first vice president in charge of sales. Our information is he runs most of the actual operations besides being a full-fledged man-around-town and keeping some cocktail waitresses from being lonely. A real swinger that one, and his father gives him his head.

"Then there's a cousin, Samuel Banner, a brain but more or less a dry stick. He's head of their whole bookkeeping operation. Our info is he doesn't approve of junior but is devoted to the old man. Joe senior put him through Yale for one thing. We figure none of the three have any real reason to steal from the outfit. After all it's their family preserve.

"In the second team there's an old friend of junior's named Peter Fromm who heads up the purchasing end. This is a bright young man—a real comer.

"The warehousing end, which includes receiving and deliveries, is under an older man named Willis

Hull. He's been with them for years. A good family man. As far as we know there's no black marks anywhere on his record.

"I also think you ought to count in a young woman named Alice Burns, who acts as assistant and right hand woman for Sam Banner. She has full charge of credit and collections. Also—and this could be important—our sources say she's really gone for Joe junior. He has a bachelor apartment on the Beach, and they say she's kept it warm for him on a fairly regular basis for a couple of years. She isn't the only one, of course, but you can make what you want out of the connection."

Shayne made his first comment. "From all that I'd say you think Junior's your most likely suspect."

"Well, what would you or anyone else think? He's the one who hells around town. The only one of the lot to specialize in the wine, women and song routine. He's the big spender and the one who needs the most money. Of course that could mean little or nothing, but I'm sure you'll check it out."

"Sure," Shayne said, "sure. Now what would you figure I might find in all this mess?"

Roberts laughed. "You're the detective, Mike, and you're supposed to be the best there is. Where would you look—all on your own I mean? Let's see some logical deduction."

"I'd rather you told me," Shayne said. "Like I told you I'm no book-

keeper, let alone cost accountant. Anyway it shouldn't be too hard to figure. You can only steal one of two things from a business like the Banner Company. When you get sticky fingers you grab for merchandise or money—or maybe even both.

"If you're placed right you might steal right off the floor. You'd figure on black-marketing the goods for cash and somehow keeping the inventory shortage from showing up. You'd know how that part of it's done. I don't. Or you might order goods from a non-existent firm and 'pay' for them by putting the money in your own pocket. I suppose the paper work would be hard to do for a cover up on that."

"It would," Roberts nodded. "It could be done though by somebody willing to take the trouble. What else?"

"If it was me," the big redhead continued, "I'd look into the chances of double-billing. Say I delivered a hundred color teevy sets to one retailer and he paid for them. What would stop me from setting up the home office records to show the order as involving only seventy sets and putting the price of the other thirty in my pocket?"

"I don't think one individual could handle it that way," Roberts said. "Too many possible places trouble could show up. A team working together—and handling the right jobs could manage it."

"That's it then," Shayne said.

"You grab goods or cash. You may tap the flow either coming into the firm or going out. It all depends on cooperation, access to records, and things like that."

"You've got the idea," the insurance attorney said. "Now see what you can find for us. How soon can you get on it?"

"Yesterday," Shayne said. "I mean as soon as I call Lucy and tell her where I'm going."

"Be my guest," Ben Roberts said and pushed his own phone across the handsome mahogany desk to where Shayne could reach it.

He dialed the number of his Flagler Street office, and his capable and efficient secretary, Lucy Hamilton, picked up the phone at the other end.

"Oh, Michael," she said. "I'm so glad you called. Can you come by here right away to see a client?"

"I don't know, Angel. I was calling to say I wouldn't be in this afternoon. What's it about?"

"I'm not entirely sure," she said, "but the young man seems to think it's urgent. I think there's a murder involved. He insists he has to see you right away. Today. He already said he'd wait till you called in."

"I still don't know," Shayne murmured. "Did he give you his name?"

"You know that's the first thing I'd ask," Lucy said. "He says his name is Banner. Joseph Banner. Joseph Banner, junior, to be exact."

Shayne looked across the desk at the lawyer and put his big hand

over the mouthpiece of the phone.

"Joe Banner junior is in my office right now," he said sotto voce. To Lucy: "I'll be right in, Angel. Have him wait."

III

MIKE SHAYNE found young Banner waiting for him in his office. Actually this was no boy—Joe Banner was at least thirty-five, although with the professionally young manner of a master salesman. His features showed the telltale marks of fast living in the fabled Gold Coast night spots, but it was neither a stupid nor an unpleasant face. Here was a man who could obviously think fast and to the point when necessity demanded; an extrovert and a good mixer, and probably capable of equally skilled use of the soft sell and the hard as occasion might require or the mood strike him.

Banner got up and gave the detective a firm handshake, but seemed disinclined to spend time on the casual social amenities.

"Mr. Shayne," he said, "I've got a problem that I think you can help me solve. It's rather a delicate matter." He looked across the office to where Lucy Hamilton sat with notebook and poised pencil. "Can we talk confidentially?"

"Miss Hamilton is in my complete confidence. She always records my interviews. You can count absolutely on her discretion."

Banner smiled. "I rather thought so, but I wanted to hear you say so."

"You can count on her," Shayne repeated. "Now, Mr. Banner, before you even go into your problem what makes you think I'm the one who can handle it for you? There's a lot of private investigators in the Miami phone book."

"Not for me," Banner said. "The truth is I've been listening to Tim Rourke of the *News* sing your praises for a long time now. Tim and I like the same bars and clubs. We're old friends and I trust his judgment in something of this sort. According to Tim you're the only real detective—private or public—in the State of Florida. He'd never forgive me if I took my personal affairs to anyone else."

"Tim's a partisan," Shayne said. "I wish I was half as good as he thinks I am. Now, what seems to be your trouble?"

Banner said: "I wish it only seemed to be trouble, Mr. Shayne. I'm afraid—I mean I'm practically certain that my father's life is in danger. His and possibly mine too. I've been thinking so for quite a while, but now I'm just about sure of it. Something has happened that is likely to speed things up. Bring on a crisis I mean. Whatever danger there was will be two or three times as bad after this. But I'm getting ahead of myself—"

"I'm afraid you are," Shayne said. "Why not go back and start at the beginning. Tell everything you think



I should know about, and Lucy will take it down for the reference file. First of all, why is your father in danger?"

"I'm not absolutely sure it is in danger," Banner said. "If it is, then it would be to protect someone who's been stealing a lot of money from us. I think that someone is afraid Father may find out. If he did, he'd turn the thief over to the Law. He would, I honestly think, even if it turned out to be me."

"I have your word it isn't?"

"Isn't me? Of course it isn't. If it was I'd never bring a man as keen as Tim Rourke says you are into the case." He went on to tell Shayne the same background of the Banner Company and its executives that the detective had already heard from the insurance lawyer.

"You can see," he continued,

"we're really pretty much of an old fashioned family firm. There are only a few of us who could really do a great deal to hurt or to help the company, and all of us have been close to each other for years. We've trusted each other — maybe more than was wise under the circumstances. I can tell you, Mr. Shayne, that up to a couple of months ago it would never in this world have occurred to me to suspect any one of us of stealing."

"That's interesting," Shayne commented. "Just what has happened to change your mind?"

"Here's what happened. I was in the warehouse one morning when the trucks were loading and going out for the day's deliveries. That's unusual to begin with. I'd gone to pick up a transistor radio I was giving one of my customers for a personal birthday gift. I like to build good will that way. I don't know why but I happened to read the shipping label on an expensive color TV set as it was put on one of our trucks. It didn't really register with me at the time. You've got to remember I was in a hurry to pick up the radio and get back upstairs for my regular morning sales meeting with my department."

"That's natural enough," Shayne said.

"Yes. Natural but unfortunate. The matter must have impressed my subconscious mind though. It kept bugging me. Late in the afternoon I began to wonder why, and then it

struck me all of a sudden. That TV was addressed to a firm name I'd never heard of. I knew something was wrong."

"What made you so sure," Shayne said. "A new account possibly? Or somebody who only placed an occasional small order so you might forget?"

"You don't understand," Banner protested. "I'm not sales manager just because I'm Joe Banner's son. Oh sure, there'd be a job for me in the firm even if I couldn't count my toes. But my job is too important to hand out like that. With a firm like ours the head of sales has got to cut the mustard or the whole operation falls apart."

"Oh, I see," Lucy said from her desk.

"I got the job because I'm both a salesman and an administrative executive," Banner said. "I have to be both, and I have to be tops at both jobs. One way I get the best out of my salesmen is by making sure I know what they're doing. I talk over every new account with the man who lands it at the time he brings it in. I keep up with the file and go over each man's list of outlets with him every few weeks. Mr. Shayne, I know who our customers are, but I'd never heard of this one."

"What was the name?"

"It was Cousin. The J. B. Cousin Hardware Company. We do have a Barney Cousin Refrigeration up in Pompano that we sell to once in a while, but we haven't any J. B.

Cousin-in Dade County. I suppose it was the similarity in names that kept me from making more inquiry when I first saw the name."

"And you think it might have been planned that way?"

"I don't know. I honestly don't know," Banner said. "When I realized I didn't know the name though I thought I'd check up. I went into the records department in book-keeping and looked at the delivery records for the day. I do that sometimes so it didn't cause any comment. Alice — Miss Burns — who handles those sheets was away from her desk, so I just looked through the truck sheets for the day.

"Every shipment delivered is supposed to be listed on a sheet that goes with the driver. When he makes a delivery the consignee or his agent has to sign for it. That way we know who actually got what. It helps keep the drivers honest too."

"Sounds like a good idea," Shayne said. "I suppose you didn't find any J. B. Cousin?"

"That's just it. I didn't. There was absolutely no record of any delivery to a firm of that name. Yet I knew I'd seen the name on a shipping tag that very same morning. At first I wondered if I could possibly have made a mistake and read it wrong, but then I knew that couldn't have been the case. On the other hand why wasn't the record kept? I can tell you it baffled me."

"What did you do then?"

"I'm sorry to say I did nothing at all. At least I'm sorry now that I didn't. When I look back I see that I should have raised hell right then and there — called everybody in and turned the place upside down if that's what it took. The bigger issue I made of the thing, the better it would have been. At least there'd have been a public showdown and it would have become almost impossible to continue whatever was going on."

"Well," Shayne asked, "why didn't you do it that way? What stopped you?"

"Poor judgment and a soft head," Banner said candidly. "If I'd been working for anybody else but my father's outfit I don't think I'd have hesitated for a minute. You have to remember how close all of us in management had been to each other. My mind just recoiled from accepting the notion that one of our team might turn out a bad hat. I guess I needed time to get used to the idea before I could bring myself to make a move. I'll admit now it was stupid to wait, but I don't see what else I could do, everything being equal."

"I know," Shayne said. "Hell's paved with good intentions and the thief can always count on his victim's sense of fair play."

"Oh Michael," Lucy said. "You're being too hard on Mr. Banner. I can understand perfectly why he delayed. I'd probably have done the same thing myself, and I think you know I would have."

"That has nothing to do with it, Angel," Shayne said. "Besides you've got me to keep you from letting sentiment put you in danger. Your soft heart wouldn't have had a chance. Go on Mr. Banner. Tell me what happened."

Banner said: "Just about what you'd expect. I decided to wait and make inquiries on my own. I looked through the sales records for a year back without finding any J. B. Cousin Hardware. There was nothing in Miss Burns' credit files under the name either. Nothing in the Chamber of Commerce Business Directory for Dade County. Or under Better Business Bureau records. A friend of mine in banking had never heard of them. There just didn't seem to be any such concern."

"You did a pretty thorough job of it for an amateur detective," Shayne commented.

"It was a poor job," Banner said. "All I came up with was a string of negative reports. No name. No trace. No record. I was convinced that teevy had gone out with a shipping tag on it. Those sets don't dissolve into thin air. They don't just vanish. A crate that goes out on one of our big Banner Trucks is either delivered to somebody or comes back on the same truck. At least I'd always thought that was what happened."

"Don't you keep records of what you buy and sell?"

"Of course we do. Any firm does. Everything we buy is listed and

paid for. It's checked into inventory then and taken out when it's sold and delivered. That's why I should have found a record of anything going to a J. B. Cousin. When I didn't it meant that any records concerning that transaction had either been destroyed or had never existed in the first place. No thieving driver or warehouse man could have handled that sort of thing. It had to be someone at the top, someone in the inner circle whom we all trusted."

"I'd think," Shayne said, "that anything as complicated as systematic destruction of records would have to involve more than one person. I hate to suggest it, but it does seem logical."

"Of course it does," Banner said. "I thought of that too. I thought of something else I don't like after that. Anyone smart enough to work out a scheme like that would also plan to cover his tracks, and how better than by framing somebody to take the blame. Who'd be more logical to leave holding the bag than me? I'm the playboy and the big spender in our group. I got a sudden and awful suspicion that evidence against me would be planted any time they felt in danger."

"It's possible that's what they'd think of. You are vulnerable to accusations," Shayne said. "Did you come to me to establish your innocence in advance?"

Banner said: "No. That isn't the way it is. I did go directly to Father. I knew he'd take my word I wasn't

mixed up in anything, and I felt he ought to know what I suspected. He was shocked and angry. I hadn't guessed how angry he was. He felt a sense of personal betrayal, and he went around the office asking questions about J. B. Cousin. He didn't find out anything, but by doing that I'm sure he alerted the guilty parties."

"When did he do this?" Shayne asked.

"Just a couple of days ago. Everybody was all upset that day anyway. A Cuban who worked in our warehouse—a new man—had been found dead. There was even some chance he'd been murdered on our property. It had the place in a turmoil."

"Is there any chance the stealing and the death could have been connected?"

"I don't know, Mr. Shayne. I suppose there might be, except that the dead man had only been with us a matter of days. I don't think he could get involved in so short a time. Unless, of course, he was already in the thing before he was hired. There isn't really any proof he was killed on our property, though."

"I see," Shayne said. "If the two things were connected, though, your father's timing was bad."

The phone in the office rang and Lucy Hamilton answered. In a moment she held out the instrument to Banner. "It's for you, Mr. Banner."

The young man spoke briefly in low tones that Shayne and Lucy



made no effort to overhear. When he put the phone back in its cradle and turned to them again his expression was that of a worried man.

"That was my secretary. She knew I was here. She got in just now from a coffee break and found there'd been a phone call from Father. He left word with the relief girl that he'd meet me at my apartment on the Beach at four o'clock as I'd asked him to. Mr. Shayne, I never asked him to do any such thing."

Shayne was out of his chair faster than anyone could have expected a man of his size to move. He took an automatic out of his desk drawer and clipped on a belt holster even before he reached for his hat.

"Come on," he said. "We better get over to your place just as fast as we can—and pray we make it before your father does. I'll take my car and you can ride with me."

"What about me?" Lucy asked.

"You stay and mind the store," Shayne said. "Come on, Mr. Banner. We don't have time to burn."

IV

THE BIG MAN pushed his car through the Causeway and Beach traffic with the ease and confidence born of long practice and experience. Though Mike Shayne took few chances and didn't seem to be in a hurry, he made time that an experienced cab driver would have envied.

Young Banner's apartment was in mid-town Miami Beach in an older building that was built with three wings making an open U shape around a courtyard planted with palms and tropical shrubs. There was a driveway from the street running behind one wing to the tenant parking area in the rear of the lot. Banner guided Shayne to his private parking space.

An open arched passage passed through the ground floor of the old, Mediterranean type structure to allow access to the front entrances from the parking lot. As they started into this Shayne and Banner almost collided with a young woman who hurried in from the street side.

Banner apparently knew her. He grabbed at her arm to stop her. She jumped and gasped as she recognized the young man. "Joe, you're hurting me! I thought I'd missed you."

"What made you think I'd be here?" Banner demanded. "I never

am in the daytime. Shayne, this is Alice Burns."

The detective recognized the name of the woman who handled credit and collections for the firm, and who was reputed to be having an affair with Joe junior. As he looked at her he could well believe the last part.

She was handsome with dyed blonde hair and a bold, inviting manner and walk. Her dress was revealing and her figure worth showing off but Shayne would have been willing to bet she was anywhere from five to ten years older than Junior Banner. For this woman the time of maximum opportunity to find either a husband or other security would begin to run out soon enough.

All this was going through Mike Shayne's mind, but all he said was: "I'm happy to meet you, Miss Burns. I've heard Joe speak of you."

He hoped Banner would take the hint and introduce him as an old friend or business acquaintance, but Joe wasn't quite quick enough on the uptake.

"This is Mike Shayne, Alice," he said instead. "You must have heard of him. He's doing some work for me."

"Shayne?" she said and wrinkled her nose. "Oh yes. The famous private eye."

"Private operative," Shayne corrected. "Joe, I think we'd better get on up to your apartment."

"I thought you weren't coming,"

Alice Burns said to Joe. "I got your message, but when I got here nobody answered the bell. I waited a few minutes and then walked downstairs. As I got to the lobby I thought I saw your father getting in the elevator, and I was glad I hadn't run into him face to face." She gave young Banner a conspiratorial look.

Shayne was sure she had a key to the apartment and was reassuring Joe that his father hadn't caught her inside.

"If your father's already here, we'd better get a move on." Shayne said. He started across the court to Banner's entry. Joe Banner came after him rather reluctantly, and Alice Burns went on into the rear parking lot to get her car.

Shayne and Banner went into the lobby together. The elevator, according to its indicator, was on the fifth floor. Joe Banner pushed the button and the old machinery began to hum as the cage dropped towards them. It was old and slow, but it finally came all the way down and the automatic door started to open.

That might have been a signal.

From somewhere above them there was the crash and roar of an explosion. The whole building seemed to rock and the elevator door jammed in its slide.

Outside the lobby doors broken glass and fragments of stone and concrete fell onto the walkway where windows had shattered and blown out.

Shayne whirled and ran for the service stairs without waiting to try and free the jammed elevator. Joe Banner ran after him. They ran up two flights.

The hall on the third floor was full of smoke and pungent fumes. The door of Banner's apartment was shattered and torn from the hinges to reveal a room filled with smashed furniture and debris. The carpet was burning in a ring around the spot where the bomb had gone off. It had evidently been placed under one of the upholstered easy chairs and detonated by a timing device of some sort.

Shayne didn't stop to find out. He ran through the room and into the hall leading to the back of the apartment. Outside the window he could already hear the wail of an approaching police prowler car siren.

Mr. Banner senior was prostrate on the hall floor almost at the end farthest from the living room. He was unconscious and there was blood on his face and a bomb fragment embedded in his left leg where it had broken the bone about four inches above the knee. A few inches higher and it would have sliced into the intestines and vital organs.

It turned out later that he'd gone to the bathroom after finding the apartment empty, and had just been coming out into the hall again when the explosion occurred. Partition walls and the long hallway had shielded him from most of the force of the blast and from all but two

small fragments of flying bomb case and debris.

Shayne started to supply emergency first aid with an improvised tourniquet above the bleeding leg wound.

By the time he got the flow of blood stopped uniformed Beach police officers were pouring into the place and a fire truck, with siren howling and rubber screaming from the friction, was turning into the street a couple of blocks away.

The police sergeant recognized Mike Shayne right away. He said: "You again. What is it this time?" and motioned to his men to put up their guns. One of the others was already phoning for an ambulance.

"All right, Mike," the sergeant said again. "What's your news release this time? Whatever it is, you know Peter Painter won't want to buy it. You're as good as locked up right now unless you've a real solid alibi."

"I never even saw this place till after it blew," Shayne said. "I can prove it by witnesses. As to what the idea was, it was attempted murder—and damned near a successful attempt, I'd say."

A car full of detectives was already parked in the street and the plainclothes men running up the stairs. The elevator was still out of commission. Shayne had to answer more questions.

The ambulance intern diagnosed the elder Banner as suffering from shock and loss of blood. He ad-

ministered a strong medication and had the old man taken to the hospital. Young Joe Banner wanted to go with him, but Shayne held him back.

"This bomb was for you," he told him. "Your father is okay. He'll have the best possible care and his injuries aren't too serious. You just haven't got time for sympathy right now. We've things to do that are more important."

The police sergeant, who had been inspecting the wreckage of the room, came over to them. "Somebody really wanted you dead. That was an expensive bomb—explosive plastic, not just a couple of sticks of dynamite. Whoever left it for you knew his business. Who was it?"

Banner was startled and caught off guard as the sergeant had intended he should be. Left to himself he would probably have blurted out the whole story. Then whoever was robbing the firm would really have been warned.

However Banner barely got his mouth open before Shayne shouldered him aside and spoke for him.

"He doesn't know," the redhead said. "He has no idea who'd hate him badly enough to do this."

"Let him speak for himself," Sergeant Murphy said, "and you keep your big mouth out of it, Shayne."

"He'll speak for himself," Shayne said, "after his lawyer gets here and not one minute before. You know enough for that, Murphy."

There was the sound of more feet on the stairs and half a dozen men came in following the Chief, Peter Painter in person. He looked the scene over, saw Shayne and said: "I should have known. What's he done now, Murphy?"

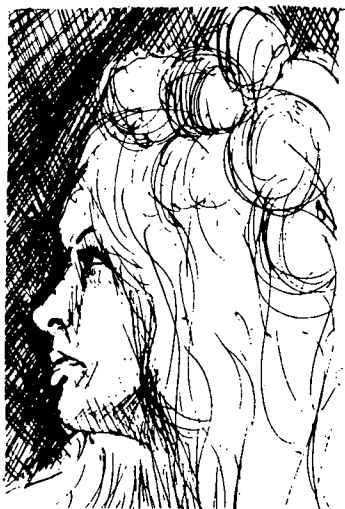
"I don't know," Murphy said. "He claims he didn't blow this place and has no idea who did. He's not very cooperative."

"When was Mike Shayne ever cooperative?" Painter asked of the world in general. It was a purely rhetorical question. He sat down on what was left of the couch. "Let's hear it."

Shayne's story was simple and to the point. He'd been coming to the apartment with his client for a business conference. Neither of them knew that the elder Banner was already there, they'd been downstairs in the first floor lobby when the bomb went off. No, his work for Mr. Banner had nothing to do with quarrels, personal enemies or threats to the man's life. It was concerned solely with business matters. He knew of no one who'd nurse a personal vendetta.

It may have been a nut or someone who put the bomb in the wrong apartment by mistake. They hadn't known that Mr. Banner senior would be in the place. He must have made a last minute decision to attend the conference with Shayne and come over on his own.

"Did he have a key?" Murphy asked.



Joe Banner nodded after a moment of hesitation.

Petey Painter kept probing for a motive. Shayne tossed him a red herring by looking a bit too obvious when he denied the possibility of a jealous husband somewhere in the background. He knew the police would dig up Joe's reputation as a playboy and make their own deductions from that. It would give them something to keep them off his neck while he tried to do his job.

Peter Painter seemed to like the idea.

"You're making a bad mistake not talking," he told Joe Banner. "If you been messing around with somebody's wife, we can understand. She had to be willing, didn't she? You tell us and we can check it out all nice and quiet. Keep clammed up like you're doing and

you just give the husband time and opportunity to make-another try. He might score on the second round."

Joe Banner kept quiet this time without any urging from Mike Shayne. It set the detective to wondering if such a situation might not actually exist.

The Chief finally had to let them go. "I wish I could hold you at least," he said to Shayne. "I know you're up to something or other. How do I know? You're always up to something, that's how. It'd be a favor to the citizens of this island just to get you out of circulation."

"Book me or let me go," the big redhead said. He knew what the answer had to be.

"Okay," Painter said. "Okay. You can both go for now. Just don't take any trips till we wind this up though."

"Mr. Banner will stay with me till you or I find the bomber," Shayne said. "If you want him for anything call Lucy at my office, and he'll come in with a lawyer. Come on, Joe."

V

THE ELEVATOR still wasn't running, so Mike Shayne and Joe Banner walked down the stairs again. Most of the police had left when the ambulance did. Only three or four detectives stayed in the apartment with Chief Painter.

Outside in the courtyard Banner started to thank Shayne.

"I could have said too much in there," he said. "If you hadn't stopped me, I could've talked myself into real trouble."

"Not too many people know when not to talk," Shayne said. "Besides you're a long way from out of trouble still. Don't tell anybody except me anything from now on. Tell your lawyer and let him tell them for you."

"I will," Joe Banner agreed, "but what do you mean about my not being out of trouble? I don't understand."

"If I know Petey Painter—and that's one man I'll guarantee you I do know—he'll have every detective on the Beach sniffing around your back trail within fifteen minutes. If they find you're heavily in debt or a big gambling loser or being black-mailed or anything like that, he'll figure he has you for sure."

"Figure he has me? For what?"

"The way Petey's mind works—that is, if you want to call it a mind—he'll figure you planted that bomb yourself, phoned your father to come over, and arranged to arrive just too late to get killed and with me as a witness."

"My God, Shayne. He can't. That's going too far. Try to kill my own father! I couldn't do a thing like that. You've got to believe me."

"I think I believe you," Shayne said, "but of course I'm not Petey. He's the one who counts. He'll think you needed big money and the old man wouldn't turn loose. You

wouldn't be the first man to try to hurry up an inheritance when you'd got yourself in a real bind. Anyway I'm just telling you what he'll think."

"He's got a low mind then," Joe Banner protested. "Of course Father can put a stop to that as soon as he can talk again. They only have to ask him. I have money of my own in a family trust—and quite a bit I inherited from my mother. Father would help me anyway if I needed money. Just like he did for Sam."

"Sam?"

"My cousin Sam Banner, who handles all the bookkeeping and accounting for the company. He got heavily in debt years ago in college. I'm not even sure I knew what it was about, but I know Father spent forty thousand dollars buying him out. I'm pretty sure Sam's borrowed large sums since, though Father never says a word about it. He, Sam that is, is down for a large bequest in Father's will too."

"That's interesting," the detective said. One big hand went up to tug an ear-lobe, a sure sign that Mike Shayne was thinking hard. "You don't think you could remember what Sam's trouble in college was about?"

"It was years ago," Joe junior said. "I was just a kid and nobody consulted me. I think there was a woman mixed up with it, and gambling, but I'm not sure. I'd hate to say when I really don't know for sure."

"Try to think back," Shayne said. "Anyway let's get going. I'd like to go by the plant with you before they close for the day if we can make it."

The two men continued across the courtyard and through the open walkway to the parking area at the rear of the building. Joe led the way towards Shayne's car, but suddenly stopped and said: "That's funny."

"What's funny?"

"Back in the spaces reserved for guests to park their cars. That's Alice's Chevrolet still sitting there. She should have left here a long time ago."

"She might have heard the bomb and waited to see what it was about."

"She'd have come up when she realized where the explosion was," Banner said with conviction. "At least she'd have hailed us when we came downstairs. No. There's something funny going on here. I'm going to take a look."

He hurried back towards the car in the rear of the lot, and Shayne went with him. As they got closer they could see that there was someone half sitting and half lying on the front seat. Both men broke into a run.

It was Alice Burns all right; stretched out on the seat looking white-faced and weak. There was blood on the left side of her dress and on the car upholstery. She had a wad of cloth, probably used to wipe moisture off the windshield on damp mornings, tightly pressed be-

tween her left arm and side. It was also red with blood.

"Oh, Joe," she gasped. "I'm so glad you're here. I heard that awful explosion, and I was afraid. What was it?"

"Forget it," Banner said, bending over her. "What in God's name happened to you? How? What?"

"I've been shot," she said looking up at the two men. "No, I don't think it's serious. I was lucky. The bullet went between my arm and my body and cut the skin on both, but it didn't hit bone. It's imbedded in the car seat. I've lost a little blood, but just a bandage should take care of it—once I come out of the shock, I mean. I don't want you to worry."

"Oh Alice," Banner gasped. He looked as if he was going to burst out in tears or go into shock himself. "Oh Alice—so close to your heart and lung. Who shot you? Who?"

"We'll find that out later," Shayne said, taking charge of the situation. He took out his car keys and pressed them into Joe's hand. "Run back to my car and get the emergency first aid kit you'll find in the trunk—and hurry it up. I'll look at the wound while you're gone and be ready to get to work on it as soon as you bring the stuff."

Banner started off.

Shayne looked down at the woman. Her eyes were too alert and her enunciation too controlled for

him to accept her claim of being in shock.

"Everybody's lucky," Shayne said. "The bomb wrecked young Joe's place, but it didn't kill anybody. We were still in the lobby and old Mr. Banner had gone to the bathroom. He was hurt but it wasn't anything serious. I know you'll be glad to hear it."

All the time he was speaking she was looking him over carefully—trying to read his mind and character, he thought. She put up her right hand and caught hold of his. Her face took on a sad, tired, almost wistful expression.

"Of course I'm glad to hear it," she said. "Mr. Banner is a wonderful old man. Of course I'm glad."

"If he had been killed he couldn't keep Joe from marrying you," Shayne said dryly, "but I suppose you wouldn't think of that. You didn't say what bomb. Do you know who set it?"

"I think you're awful," she flared at him. "What do you mean? Of course I don't know anything about a bomb. It could have killed both of them, and then where would I be?"

"Could have killed me too," Shayne said.

The fingers holding his left hand moved almost caressingly. She looked up at him and he could have sworn she smiled. "You'll excuse me, Mike Shayne, if I say I don't really care about that. I just wouldn't care if it had killed you."

Then Joe Banner came running up with Shayne's big emergency accident kit. The big man took it from him and went deftly and surely to work on the two wounds. For their size and strength his hands were amazingly gentle. The only time she winced was when he used the antiseptic.

As she'd said the bullet had passed between arm and body and gouged a surface furrow in each. The gun had been held so close there were powder burns on dress and skin.

"Who did it?" Shayne asked. "You should have had a good look."

She ignored the implication. "He popped up right beside the car—or at least that's the way it seemed. I was so scared I didn't get a close look except to see he was wearing a nylon stocking mask. He didn't say anything, just fired and I fell back into the seat. He ran away and I stayed where I was for fear he'd come back if he saw me move."

"Oh, Alice," Banner said. "Poor darling. I'll stay with you now so I can protect you in case he tries to come back."

"No you won't," Shayne said. "You belong with your father. Your car's parked near my office. I'll drive you both over there and then you go to the hospital. Don't let your father out of your sight. Somebody tried to kill him—remember."

"I won't leave Alice," Banner said stubbornly.

"Sure you will. Alice can stay

with Lucy Hamilton at my office. There's a couch in the back room and a doctor can be called if she needs one. On the way over you write me a note—*To Whom It May Concern* — saying I'm going to search your offices and warehouse with your permission. Everybody's to cooperate. Sign it a way your people will recognize. I'll take care of that end of things. Then you go guard your father."

Shayne finished giving first aid to the shallow wounds. Alice was able to walk over to his car under her own power though Joe had a solicitous arm around her waist.

"I don't understand it," Banner said. "Why try to kill you?"

"Maybe the bomber thought she'd seen him and recognized him," Shayne said carelessly.

Banner wouldn't let it rest there. "Maybe whoever's stealing from the firm thinks we're closing in. He might believe Alice knows things that would give us a clue to who he is. That would account for his wanting her dead. Wouldn't it?"

"Stealing?" Alice Burns said. "I don't know what you're talking about. What do you mean?"

"I mean J. B. Cousin and Company," Banner said, "but of course you wouldn't know about that."

"I mean a lot more than Cousin and Company," Shayne said. "You wouldn't know about that either I suppose."

"I don't know what either of you

are talking about," she said. Shayne started the car.

Back at Flagler Street Lucy Hamilton took competent charge of Alice Burns, while Shayne saw that Joe Banner gave him proper written authority to do as he wished on the firm's premises.

He had trouble getting Banner to leave, but the big redhead could be both firm and authoritative when he saw fit. It would have taken a lot stronger man to resist him when he made up his mind to something. Banner finally kissed the woman a tender good-by and took his leave.

"He's such a fine man," Alice Burns said as the door closed behind him.

"So he is," Shayne said, "and his father too. If I were you I'd keep both facts in mind till this whole caper's ended."

She had the trick he'd already noticed of ignoring his words when she wanted to.

"Thanks a lot for helping me," she said, reaching for her bag. "I'm quite well enough to go on home now."

Shayne's big hand shot out and got hold of the bag before she could touch it.

"No," he said. "You're not near well enough to go any place at all. You're going to stay right here for a while where Lucy can look after you."

"I'm all right, I say. Just that little scratch—"

"And the broken leg you'll have

before you can get through the door," Shayne grinned at her. "I mean it, dolly. Don't try anything stupid now."

"What do you mean, Michael?" Lucy Hamilton said. In spite of the surprise in her voice she got up and stood by the door. Lucy knew her Mike Shayne.

"I mean Miss Burns is going to be our guest for a while," Shayne said. "Go get a glass of water and a couple of those sedative pills in the washroom medicine cabinet."

"I won't drink any Mickey Finn."

The big man ignored Alice's defiance. He reached into her purse and pulled out a flat black .32 ACP automatic pistol. He took out the magazine and smelled of the barrel.

"Been fired," he said to nobody in particular. "Like I thought. When you shot yourself. Anybody wanted to kill you would have done it at that range."

"I don't know what he wanted to do. Let me out of here."

"Maybe you can sell that to Joe Banner," Shayne said. "I don't care about that, but I'm a pro. I don't buy it."

Lucy Hamilton locked the office door and went into the washroom for the sedative.

"I'll go scream out the window," Alice Burns said. By her expression she meant it.

"You do and you'll lean over too far, get faint and fall out. In case you forgot this is the third floor. You just be good and do as you're

told. That way you'll go to sleep for a few hours. When you wake up I'll be through at the plant and we'll let you go."

"I don't believe you."

"You'd better believe me," Shayne said. His right thumb and forefinger tugged at his left earlobe. "I know you're part of the gang, but Joe Banner's in love with you. He doesn't know it. If you're not part of the action from here on he doesn't have to know unless you or I tell him. You didn't know I was coming when you set that bomb. Now behave yourself and don't make waves."

She thought it over and seemed to believe him. When Lucy returned she took the two capsules without a struggle.

"Lock her in the back office," Shayne said.

"But Michael—"

"I've got a hard evening ahead. Just do as I say."

Lucy didn't argue the point, but took Alice's arm and helped her into the back room. The woman was slightly groggy already, but it would be some minutes before the sedative would put her to sleep.

Lucy Hamilton came out and locked the door behind her.

"You didn't forget there's an extension phone in there?" she asked.

"I didn't forget." He eased the phone on his desk and listened for a minute. Then he carefully put it back in the cradle.



"You wanted her to call her confederates?" Lucy asked.

"Yeah, but I wanted to find out who they were. She was too smart for that. She told somebody I was coming and who I was and kept him from even saying boo himself. Not only didn't use his name, but I never even heard his voice."

VI

IT WAS AFTER five in the afternoon before Mike Shayne drove into the Banner Company plant parking lot in Hialeah. Most of the office help had left for the night, but a few were working overtime.

The warehouse people had to wait until all the delivery trucks had checked in from their daily routes. It would be at least another hour before the last of them came in and longer than that before the floor crew could check out.

The man Shayne really wanted to see was cousin Sam Banner, who was an accountant and took care of all the bookkeeping for the firm

with his assistants. However both Sam and his secretary had already left for the day. Shayne went through the motions of asking for Alice Burns and was told she'd not come in at all since lunch.

"But I think Mr. Fromm is still in his office. You can go upstairs and see if you want." This from a bored receptionist already busy putting on lipstick for a dinner date.

Peter Fromm, it appeared, was Alice Burns's opposite number in Bookkeeping. He was in charge of purchasing controls and paper work as she was of credit and collection.

"Mr. Banner junior orders stock for sales," Fromm told the detective, "but of course I do all the paper-work involved. As far as office and maintenance supplies are concerned, I have full authority."

Since he seemed rather proud of the fact, Shayne said a hearty: "That's fine. Congratulations," and tried to make it sound as if he was genuinely impressed. "All the stock orders originate with Mr. Joe junior then?"

Fromm was a thin little man with a hacking tobacco cough.

"That's right," he agreed. "At least he has to okay everything. Once in awhile, where it's a regular order, Mr. Sam may ask me to go ahead and order or reorder. But of course he has to check with Mr. Joe himself in those cases."

"How come? Don't they trust each other?"

"Why of course they do." Fromm

bridled as much as it was in such a mild creature to do so. "It's a matter of company policy. That's all."

"Okay, okay. By the way, did you ever hear of a customer by the name of J. B. Cousin Hardware?"

To Shayne's very great surprise Fromm had. He nodded: "Why yes. They're a small outfit up in West Palm. Not a good customer at all, but once in a while we make a small drop shipment to them."

"Well, well. Now we're getting some place," Shayne thought, preparing to revise his whole line of thinking.

Aloud all he said was: "Good. Can you let me see the file on them?"

"I'm sorry, sir. There isn't a regular file. Not enough business involved. As I understand it the man's a friend of Mr. Joe senior and that's the only reason we do business with him at all. There's probably something in Mr. Banner's private files, but I wouldn't dare go in there without authority."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," Shayne said. "Well, no matter."

The big detective had something to think about now. Perhaps the Cousin Hardware matter was just a legitimate deal after all. If that was so, though, why the bomb this afternoon? Why the killing of the Cuban employee? It was a sure thing that something of major importance was going on.

What Fromm had said hadn't really solved anything. It had just

alerted Shayne and jolted him out of a fixed pattern of thinking. Now he wasn't even sure what he was looking for except that it was something big enough so he could be certain his own life was in danger every moment of the time.

He went on down to the warehouse where Tony Cabeza had probably been murdered. Willis Hull, the warehouse manager, was in his partitioned off office near the loading dock where the big trucks pulled in and out.

Hull was a burly, balding man with hard grey eyes and teeth stained yellow by years of chewing cut plug. He'd been with the firm for years and knew his job thoroughly, but when Shayne showed up he was obviously more than half drunk.

Apparently he was sure enough of his standing with the bosses not to care, for he made no effort to hide the half-empty fifth of cheap rye standing on his battered desk. Neither did he bother to offer Shayne a drink while he read his letter from Joe Banner junior.

"Another damn fly-cop," Hull said in what he probably considered an amiable tone. "Private shamus at that. Well, let me tell you, I think you're wasting your time. I don't think the old guy was knocked off here. Small loss if he was."

"What makes you think he wasn't?" Shayne asked. "You can't see much from this desk."

"You work in a warehouse as long as I have, you don't need to

see. You smell what goes on. I wasn't even at work that day, so they could have killed a regiment by squads. I wouldn't have seen nothing. I just don't think the old man'd been here long enough to make an enemy who would kill him. Hey, what you doing there?"

"Thanks, I will have one," Shayne said. He had picked up the whiskey bottle by the neck, and now he put it to his mouth and drank. The raw, cheap spirits made him cough. He put the bottle back on the desk.

"You cheap dicks make me sick," Hull said. He picked up the bottle by the neck and took a big swallow. "You sure make me sick," he said again.

Then, holding the bottle by the neck, he stood looking at the detective.

"Why do you drink cheap rotgut like that?" Shayne asked. "This job must pay pretty good."

Hull laughed. "You wouldn't think it was that good if you had a big-mouthed old woman and four teenage punks always whinin' and hollerin' for money."

Without any warning at all he took a terrific backhanded swipe at Shayne with the bottle. It smashed against the big man's head and staggered him, off balance, against the thin partition. Dimly Shayne saw Hull standing there holding the bottle. He would have fallen except for the partition. He knew figures were

running at him from outside the office.

He got one foot up and kicked a dimly seen man in the stomach. The figure reeled back but grabbed Shayne's foot and ankle with both hands and pulled.

Shayne came away from the wall, hopping awkwardly on one foot and flailing the air with both iron fists. He landed a blow on the larger of the two men attacking him, but was so off-balance that there wasn't any real steam behind the punch. The man didn't go down. He grabbed the redhead's arm and yelled something the detective couldn't make out.

The fellow holding his foot kept pulling one way and the other man pulled and twisted his arm. Shayne, only half conscious anyway, tried to brace himself to land a solid blow.

Then Hull hit him again with the bottle. It didn't quite put the redhead out but it did put him down. He went limp all over and started to crumple. The two men holding him both let go, and he fell on the dirty floor in a heap. He was almost out but not quite. A smaller, weaker man would have been completely comatose, but Shayne could see and hear dimly.

Hull's voice came dimly as if from a long way off. "Damn you, Jack. Why did you make me do that? You know I hate a row."

"You got no choice," said a voice Shayne didn't recognize. "Less'n you want us tell Mr. Banner 'bout

your boozin' and swiping stuff, you do like we say."

"You already told your damn Mr. Banner," Hull spat at him. "Don't you think I know that much? He's the one told you to put the screws on me. I got one choice left though, and you better not push me. I don't want no more killing. I wasn't even here when old Tony got his, and I don't aim to set myself up for no murder rap. You get that big shamus out of my warehouse before you cut him up. I don't want to know nothing about it. Nothing."

There was a thin cackle of vindictive laughter.

"Your warehouse?" said the voice. "You lousy lush. You ain't got nothin' no more except that bottle. Okay, go on home. Fats and me'll close up this place. The rest of the crew's gone. You go too. We won't touch this tough fuzz no more. Leastways not till you're gone, if that makes you happy . . ."

"Yeah. Go on out of here," said another voice. It wasn't either as tough or as sure of itself as that of the man called Jack Turner. "Go on. I don't want no more killing either. Just get out of here and leave us think what we can do with this bum."

Mike Shayne's head was beginning to clear just a little. He lay crumpled up just as he'd fallen and kept his eyes closed, but his breathing was more even and his hearing improving. He knew he'd be able to see if he opened his eyes. He

was a very strong man who kept himself in fighting trim and top physical condition. He could shake off the effects of a beating in one tenth of the time it would have taken an ordinary man.

He was counting on his attackers not being smart enough to think of this as long as he continued to play dead. He also knew by now that he had a while in which to build up strength. His danger wouldn't start until Hull had time enough to leave the building.

Shayne wondered if it was Joe Banner or his father who was working with these men Jack and Fats. Time enough to worry about that when and if he got out of this jam alive.

He lay still and felt his head grow clearer with each second that passed.

From the sounds Mike Shayne could tell that Hull was taking another swig from the whiskey bottle.

"Hurry up," the voice of the man called Jack said. "You want us to wait, then go on get out of here. Save some of that rotgut. Drink it all now and you won't be able to drive. Then maybe we knock you off too."

"Oh shut up," Hull said. "I can carry more liquor'n you ever saw." Nevertheless his feet shuffled across the cement floor and he left the office. Shayne hadn't heard him put the bottle down so he figured the man must have taken the rest of the drink with him.

"What are we going to do?" Fats said after Hull had left. "You know the boss said no more killing? You know that, don't you?"

"What difference what he said?" That was Jack Turner talking. "Just how much choice do you think we got anyhow, Dumbo? What's this big dick going to do if we let him stay alive? You think maybe he'd just thank us and go on home?"

Shayne thought to himself—why not try me and see? He kept his mouth shut and lay perfectly still.

"I don't like killing," Fats said stubbornly.

"Look, Fatso. Nobody asked you if you like it. I don't like it neither. This boss don't like it. He sounds like you whining at me. As if I killed guys for laughs or something. Believe me it ain't so. We hadn't no choice with the old spik, and we got no choice with this Mike Shayne. We got to kill him or we get it ourselves all legal like and polite. How would you go for them apples?"

"I suppose so," said the reluctant Fatso.

"You had just better suppose so. Believe me, the boss hears you cackle like a dumb chicken, he'll begin to wonder should he let you stay alive. Believe me, Fatso, I don't want to see you get hurt. I'm your friend. So just shut up and let's get on with it."

Here it comes, Shayne thought. I better be ready. He set himself for action and cracked open the eye

next to the floor. All he could see was their feet.

"Pull him out here," Jack said. "I'll smash his head with this."

The larger of the two pairs of feet in the heavy, laced work shoes stayed where it was. The smaller pair took a step towards Shayne's face. He couldn't see what the other man was going to smash his head with, but he didn't mean to be tamely dragged into position like a sheep before the knacker.

His arms shot out together and his big hands closed on the two ankles of the man moving up on him. He pulled and heaved upwards and threw the man backwards across the room where he landed on his back with a yell and a crash.

With almost the same motion Shayne came to a sitting position. The second man, the big one with the hare-lip, was fast. He swung at Shayne's head with a long iron pry-bar of the type used to open heavy wooden crates. If the blow had landed it would have splintered the redhead's skull.

He barely managed to duck under the path of the weapon. It hit the corner of Hull's office desk, broke the top of the two-by-two corner post and smashed the heavy glass cover of the desk top into fifty sharp, dagger pointed shards.

Shayne put his left hand on the floor, twisted his legs under him, pushed and came erect. As he came to his feet he grabbed for the pry-

bar and got a grip on it at about the middle point.

Hare-lip Turner let go of the bar and Shayne, who'd expected a tug of war, was thrown off balance and almost fell backward to the floor again. His shoulders hit the partition and kept him erect.

Jack Turner aimed a tremendous kick at Shayne's groin. It would probably have killed him if it had landed but Shayne instinctively swatted at the leg with the iron bar. He felt it connect and the leg bone give under the impact. The snap of the bone was perfectly audible in the silent warehouse.

The second man, Fatso Foerster, scrambling to his own feet across the office, heard it and made a whimpering noise.

Any normal man would have screamed, but Turner was a fighter by instinct. He howled like a wolf coming in for the kill and hopped backwards on the one good leg to give himself room.

Shayne could have killed him with the iron bar, but he wanted the man alive for questioning. He held the pry-bar like a saber and advanced on the fellow, looking for an opening to bring him to the floor again. The fellow was still fast and knew what he was doing in spite of what must have been the terrible pain of his smashed leg. He hopped again and was out of the office door and across the alley left between two stacks of packing cases.

Too late, Shayne saw what he

was after. Turner got his hand on another iron bar that was twin to the first. He got his back to the cased refrigerators so he didn't have to worry about balance, and waited for Shayne to get in reach. The heavy bar waved in his hand as if it were a green twig. Hurt as he was, Jack Turner was still a terribly dangerous opponent.

Shayne moved away from the office door so he wouldn't have Fatso Foerster at his back. He couldn't watch two directions at once, and he didn't dare take his eyes off the weapon in Jack's hand.

"Drop it, you fool," Shayne said as calmly as he could. "I don't want to kill you."

"I want to kill you," the man said with frightful intensity. "Come and see, shamus. Come a little closer."

Shayne flipped back his jacket to show the gun in his belt holster. "I can kill you from here if I want to. You forgot about this when I was on the floor.

Turner was too hurt and angry to be afraid.

"You don't come for me, I come for you," he said. "Then we see if you got time to use this thing."

"I got all the time I want," Shayne said. "You can't catch me on one leg. Don't you understand, I just want to talk. I'll make a deal, you fool. A deal. Your life for what I need to know."

Probably Turner didn't listen enough to comprehend what the



redhead had said. He gave his wolf howl again and came off the wall of cases with the sheer ferocity of a wolverine with its leg in a bear trap. Even hurt, he was so fast he almost got on top of Shayne. The iron bar missed by a fraction of an inch.

In the enclosed warehouse the rifle shot crashed like a fired cannon and then boomed and echoed.

The high velocity, hollow nosed slug hit Jack Turner's chest like a giant's closed fist. It almost knocked him down. He braced with the broken leg and this time the agony must have been beyond any endurance. The big man screamed and a bloody froth sprayed out of his mouth. He tried to lunge forward again.

The second shot hit close to the entrance wound of the first. This one knocked him down on his back

with the broken leg twisted under him at a grotesque angle. Even then he wasn't quite dead. His limbs twisted and jerked like dying snakes and the blood pooled under him. His breath came out in a whistling rush, and he died.

Mike Shayne had his own gun out and was moving fast along a line of crated electric cooking ranges which gave him cover.

The shots had come from high up and behind him, so that at first he'd been sheltered by the seven foot partition and ceiling of the warehouse office. The killer had to be up on the iron-grilled narrow balcony which ran all round the warehouse up close to the roof. Normally it was a walkway from which the whole floor of the nearly two-acre space could be inspected and watched. Many modern storage areas have the same or a similar feature.

A corkscrew iron stairway led up to the balcony from the floor below. At least two doors and several windows also gave access from the top floor of the offices on the street side of the lot. Shayne couldn't either cut off the gunner's retreat or get up the spiral of iron steps without exposing himself as an easy target.

His own idea was to reach the master electric switch and cut off the lights, but he saw it was against the wall in a small cleared area that could be seen from above. He wondered if he could shoot out the

switch in such a way as to short the lights, and wished he'd taken an electrician's course in the past.

If he couldn't do that, could he get to one of the doors into the ground floor offices or out onto the big truck loading dock and railroad siding? For the moment he could stay covered by merchandise, but his enemy was free to move around the narrow balcony. Sooner or later any spot on the floor would come under his rifle sights.

Shayne got the diversion he needed, but not in the way he would have wanted.

Fatso Foerster, the second of the pair who had killed Tony Cabeza had been inside the office all this time. He'd seen Turner die and had time to realize that whoever killed his partner would want to kill him too. It was more than his over active imagination could take.

The man came out of the office at a scuttling run, headed for the door to the loading ramp. He kept the piled crates between him and the spot from which the shots that killed Jack Turner had come.

It didn't do him any good of course. As Shayne had guessed he would, the killer had shifted position to the opposite angle of the balcony. Instead of covering himself the fleeing man was just being careful to make an easy target.

The first shot broke Foerster's hips and brought him down to the dirty concrete floor. The second blew off the top of the man's head.

"There goes my witness," Shayne said to himself. "I could have made that one talk."

While the rifleman was firing the second shot Shayne got to the master power switch, pulled it down, and ran back under cover. All the electricity serving the main floor was now cut off. The place wasn't really dark of course. There were small, high windows and it wasn't yet dark outside. There were dark pools of shadow now and the light was dim and liable to fool the eyes. Shayne had managed to give himself partial cover and make things considerably more difficult for anyone trying to snipe at him from long range.

To keep from setting himself up as a target, Shayne kept on the move, running from one stack of crated goods to another.

He had a fairly good notion where the sniper had been when he killed Fatso Foerster, and worked his way over until he was under the gallery at that end of the warehouse.

He discovered then that the gallery floor wasn't solid metal slabs. Like the platforms of many fire escapes it was a semi-open grille of narrow strips of metal bolted together and set on edge. Looking up he could see a dark blur where the body of the man cut off light filtering down through the open spaces between the metal spots.

On impulse Shayne raised his big forty-five.

"Have some of your own medi-

cine, chum," he said grimly, and fired at the shadow. It would have been just plain luck if he'd hit the man. Even if he could have hit right under his feet the chances against the slug going through cleanly between the metal slats were astronomical.

He heard the big bullet clang on metal—actually it broke one of the slats and forced the jagged edge upwards. The killer's legs were sprayed with dust-sized bits of lead and iron, and Shayne heard his yell of pain and anger. Otherwise he was unhurt physically.

The same couldn't be said of his nerve. The surprise attack from below with the prospect of its being repeated again and again was apparently more than the man could take. There was a flash of light and the sound of a door opening and shutting to tell the redhead that his enemy had gone back into the office side of the building.

Shayne was too smart to run up the iron stairway in pursuit. With no more need to hide, he ran through the open space to a ground floor door to the offices. It was fastened, but he shot away the lock.

The killer was also smart. Instead of using inside stair or elevator he came down the outside fire escape. Too late Shayne heard his footsteps and then the squealing motor of a small, light car as the accelerator was forced to the floor.

The battle of the warehouse was over.

VII

MIKE SHAYNE took time to wash and clean up before leaving the Banner Company building. He went back into the warehouse office and recovered the hat he'd worn when he came in earlier that afternoon.

Apparently no one had heard the shots. The building was constructed to be fireproof and burglarproof, and one of the side effects was to make it almost soundproof as well. It was also surrounded by similar structures and the fight had taken place after almost everyone had finished work and left the area, and the killer was well advised to feel safe from interruption.

Shayne checked the bodies of the two warehouse men who had attacked him. Both of the men were very, very dead indeed. The big man looked at the shattered body of Jack Turner and wondered again at the amount of punishment it had taken.

He went on up to the offices, but there was no clue to be found there. Everything was in order just as the departing workers had left it. He'd have to look elsewhere for a clue to the killer's identity. Actually Shayne thought he had a pretty good idea where to look. The man had to be part of the executive structure of the firm, in the confidence of the senior and junior Banners and in a position to secure cooperation from Alice Burns. Only a few persons

could meet all the specifications.

Shayne used the office phone to call Lucy Hamilton at his own office. He told her he'd be delayed well into the evening but omitted all gory details of the fighting that had taken place.

"If Joe Banner junior calls," he said, "tell him I'm making a lot better progress than I expected. As a matter of fact you'd better not wait to see if he calls us. You try him at the hospital or his father's house. I don't think he'd go back to the bombed out apartment on the beach. Try it though. if you can't locate him anyplace else."

"Will do," Lucy said. "Are you sure you're okay, Michael?"

"I'm all right, Angel, but I don't want young Joe or his father to get hurt. You tell him to stay right with the old man and not—I repeat, not—to check him out of the hospital, even if the old man wants to go home and the doctor says it's okay. Tell him I want them both where there are a lot of witnesses and people moving about. At least till morning I do."

"I can see your point," Lucy said.

"I thought you would. Then you check. Call the hospital every couple of hours and have the floor nurse check to see that both of them are still there. Tell her to see for herself. I particularly want to know if Joe junior leaves at any time."

"They're in a Beach hospital, aren't they?"

"That's right. And Petey will

have it staked out like the vault at Fort Knox because he knows I'm in the case. As long as they stay there, they'll be safe. I just don't want Junior playing amateur detective and wandering around where somebody can get a shot at him. The head man in this caper is dangerous, just like a coral snake in the weeds."

"I'll do what I can to keep him under cover, but you watch yourself too, Michael."

"Tangling with me and with a nice young guy like Junior are two different bags of tricks," Shayne said. "Don't worry about me. By the way how's our girl friend the sleeping beauty coming along? All quiet on that front?"

"She's sleeping like a baby since the pills took hold," Lucy assured him. "I go in every few minutes to see that she hasn't moved or waked and to keep an eye on that arm wound. I wouldn't want it to get infected. What's it about anyway? Did she shoot herself?"

"I'm pretty sure she did, Angel," Shayne said. "I'm sure she's part of the gang that's been stealing from her boyfriend. She might even be the one who set that bomb, though I really don't think she wanted young Joe dead. Though somebody else did for sure. She might have seen whoever did it and guessed what was up and wanted to delay us till after the thing blew up. The shooting would be to make us think they were after her too. Or she might have planned to tell us they

shot her and tell them we did it. You know—play both ends against the middle."

"She wasn't on our side when she made that phone call just before the pills got her," Lucy said shrewdly.

Shayne thought of the warehouse massacre that had been Alice's boss's reply to the warning she'd phoned him. He didn't go into that with Lucy.

"Just keep an eye on her," he said. "By morning I'll probably have this thing wrapped up, and then we can decide what to do about Miss Alice Burns."

He hung up the phone, put out the office lights and went out by one of the side doors to the building. He was glad the Banner Company didn't have a regular night watchman.

The big detective had parked his car a little way down the street. He got it started and drove east toward the City of Miami proper. As he did a Hialeah police car drove into the cross street from the West. Shayne watched through his rear view mirror and saw it pull up to the front of the Banner plant.

"Good thing I didn't hang around any longer," he told himself. "Ten to one the Hialeah cops got an anonymous phone call—just in case they could find one private detective with all the blood and bodies back there."

In a moment more he was out of the jurisdiction of the Hialeah force and out of sight of the plant.

"If I'd been an accountant instead of just a detective," he thought, "I'd be back there now poking through the files for evidence the books were doctored. The local cops would scoop me in, and by the time I got out again he'd have plenty of time to set up his innocence or jump the country with the loot. Whoever he is, he's smart as well as tough."

Shayne thought he knew the identity of the man he was after, and it was a characteristic of him to go directly to that man for final proof of guilt.

He drove toward Miami Beach until he reached the big estate where Samuel Banner lived alone. Big Sam, the company money man, had never married or had children, but he kept an establishment big enough to quarter a regiment. The house itself was centered in about four acres of lushly landscaped grounds. It stood three stories tall. The rooms were high-ceilinged and large and full of heavy, expensive European antique furniture.

There was a housekeeper who had a cottage in the far corner of the grounds behind the swimming pool. The other servants were none of them on a "live in" status, but came and went during the day as their services were required.

It was still early in the evening. There were lights in the big ground floor dining room and Shayne, as his car came up the curving driveway from the entrance gates, could

see someone at the dinner table.

The redhead parked his own car directly in front of the house. He was making no attempt to conceal his arrival. The front door was locked so he rang, and the door was opened by a dark haired, copper skinned Cuban serving woman. Shayne gave his name and was shortly ushered into the dining room.

Sam Banner was sitting at the head of the table. He had just finished dessert and was having a cigar with his brandy and coffee.

He wasn't alone. The dapper little man in the expensive Italian silk suit seated across the table from him was Miami Beach Police Chief Peter Painter. The Chief was smiling and very much at ease.

"Hello, Shayne," he said with obvious pleasure, "we've been waiting for you. Come on in, boys."

The door to the pantry opened and four of Painter's detectives came into the room and lined up rather self-consciously along the wall.

"In case you think you can take the five of us," Painter said, "the house is staked out too."

"I'm sure it is," Shayne said. "For a stupid man you've always been careful, Petey."

The big redhead pulled out a chair and sat down at the table. He reached for the brandy bottle and a glass and poured himself a drink. It was excellent brandy.

"Since I seem to be the condemned man here," Shayne said,

"suppose you tell me what it's all about. I haven't done anything."

Sam Banner sat there and smiled at him like a cat watching a mouse.

"I always said you'd over-reach yourself so I could hang you," Painter said. This time, by God, you've done it. This is what I've been waiting for for twenty years."

"I don't understand," Shayne said. "I've just been finding out who's been stealing the Banner Company blind. What's wrong with that?"

"With that, nothing. With killing two men this afternoon—and probably an old man a couple of days ago, and setting off a bomb—with all that there's plenty wrong."

"Sure," Shayne said. "Sure. Only I didn't do any of that, Petey. And you know that! The closest I might have come was trying to nail one man who wanted to kill me, but I didn't even manage that. You're out of your mind, friend."

"About an hour ago," Painter said, "the Hialeah police got an anonymous tip you'd broken into the Banner building."

"Me? Or just a prowler?"

"You, Shayne. By name. When they went to look the warehouse was full of blood and bodies. A couple of men apparently surprised you and you shot them to death. They got your prints in the warehouse and in the offices upstairs. They put out an A.P.B. Mr. Banner senior is in the hospital, and his boy's with him. When I talked to Mr. Samuel



Banner here, he said you'd probably come here to accuse him of something. I decided to wait for you myself. Now lie out of that, if you can."

"I don't have to, Petey," Shayne said, and drank some brandy. "That story's as full of holes as a hundred pound wheel of Swiss cheese."

"You've conned your way out of trouble for years," the Chief said. "Not now. I don't know what it is this time, but it won't go."

"I think I know what Mr. Shayne is going to do," Sam Banner said. "He's going to accuse me of juggling the company books. Even if it was true, no charges have been filed by anyone."

"I know," Shayne said, "so I'm accusing you of murder instead."

"You seem to be oversupplied with nerve," Banner said with his eye on the brandy bottle. "Suppose you explain that remark." He was a big man, slightly balding but with sharp, aquiline features and alert

eyes. Shayne could see the family resemblance to young Joe, but there was neither eagerness nor naivete left anywhere in the older man's face.

"Let's skip the preliminaries," Shayne said suddenly. "We know you've been stealing from the Banner Appliance Company. We know Alice Burns has been working with you. Being one of the family I suppose you thought you had a right to the bigger share. I wouldn't know about that. It was my job to find you, and I did."

To Shayne's surprise Banner looked almost amused. "You're very sure of yourself, Shayne. Tell me, just what do you think you know, and how did you find it out?"

"Young Joe found out something was going on. Also your insurance company thinks your books are too perfect. Big stealing meant an inside man. You're the logical one. You handle all the money and you're in the family, so they trust you. You're responsible for the books. Also you spend a lot of money.

"If it was you, you'll need help from Alice Burns. She implicated herself this afternoon. Once suspicion's been aroused, and it has, believe me, the insurance people will send in their own auditors to find out how much you got and how you got it. I don't know. Phony accounts I suppose. Dummy buyers and sellers. The insurance accountants will track it down to the last

penny. Right now that's not important."

"I'm glad you realize it isn't important," Banner said. "Even if all you say is true—which I'm not for a minute admitting—it's all still in the family. I could talk to Uncle Joe and make restitution and there'd be no criminal charges. There's nothing in that to make me risk killing anybody. My lawyers can have any charges thrown out of court."

"The way you say it they might," Shayne said. "Only you forgot to mention Bob Foerster and Jack Turner. Better known to you as Fatso and Hare-lip."

"Who?" Painter asked.

"The corpses in the warehouse. The ones you want to pin on me. They were Sam's boys and they killed an old Cuban who spotted something going on. That put Sam Banner on the spot marked X. He knew the police would run down a murder and the boys would talk. There he'd be accessory after the fact at the least. His whole game was going to blow up.

"That's when he decided to go for broke. With Alice Burns to plant a bomb he could kill the two other Banners. Then the company was his. He couldn't be blamed for stealing from himself. Probably Fatso would have been framed for the killing of the old man. Fatso was expendable.

"Only Alice Burns had been having an affair with young Joe. Prob-

ably had ideas of marrying him and double crossing Sam for fair. She kept young Joe and me out of the apartment long enough to miss the bomb. Then when she saw I'd guessed the truth about her she called Sam and warned him I was on my way to the offices. Sam called his boys to finish me off. Ask Mr. Hull if they didn't try."

"So you killed them," Painter said, "when they tried."

"I'm laughing," Shayne said. "The coroner will tell you both of them were killed by rifle fire from the balcony. The wound channels will prove it."

Sam Banner didn't look quite so confident now.

"Maybe you had a rifle," Painter said.

"Not me. A rifle won't fit a belt holster. The killer followed up to see they got me. When they failed,

they were killed before they could talk. Killed by Sam Banner."

"I want my attorney," Banner said.

"I think you're crazy, Shayne," Painter said. "Mr. Banner says he played golf this afternoon. You can't prove a thing—"

"I don't care what he says," Shayne said. "He was on the iron gallery of that warehouse with a rifle. I fired at him from below. Go there and you'll see where I hit the narrow iron strips that floor the gallery. When you question Banner take off his shoes and socks. Your doc will find minute fragments of lead and iron imbedded in his legs. I heard him cry out in pain when he got them."

Sam Banner looked sick.

"The charge is murder, Petey," Shayne said. "Murder in the first degree."

NEXT MONTH'S EXCITING HEADLINER

DEATH IS MY PAYOFF

Here's another great new Brett Halliday novel starring the famous redheaded private eye, Mike Shayne. Tune in on some exciting reading pleasure when the girl told him, "You're a good man, Shayne. But good men die young." Then he saw the deadly gun . . .

A Thrilling New Mike Shayne Short Novel

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

Some of them are lady killers, some are just killers, period. For the predatory wolves who prowl big city streets at night looking for jewels know no law save the law of the thieves' jungle: "Get it clean if you can. But if you have to kill to do it—do it." Here's the lowdown on the men who know too well that

DIAMONDS ARE A THIEF'S BEST FRIEND

by DAVID MAZROFF

THIEVES ARE STEALING millions of dollars worth of diamonds yearly. However, the modern jewel thief is not the suave, smooth operator of yesteryear. On the contrary, he is a common gunman, harsh, cruel, vicious, and deadly.

This was clearly evinced in the robberies committed by two teams of thieves who held up Zsa Zsa Gabor and Sophia Loren recently. The two crude characters who stuck up gorgeous blond Zsa Zsa and her companion in the elevator of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel one early morning scared hell out of her and her companion by threatening to kill

them if Zsa Zsa didn't hand over her jewels without an argument. She handed over about \$600,000 worth of diamonds, according to her estimate of the value of the gems.

"Dahling," she said, "they took ten years off my life. Ah, that is good in a way"—she managed to smile—"if it was ten years from my age. But no, dahling. It was from my life. I cannot afford ten years from my life. None of it was insured, dahling. What I should do now, huh?"

Zsa Zsa may have exaggerated the amount of her loss but it may safely be said that the value of her

The STRANGE TRUE STORY of ARTHUR BARRY



loss was at least sixty to seventy-five per cent of her declared loss.

This was the second time she was so rudely separated from a fortune in jewelry. The first time was some years ago when she was in Hollywood. Movie stars and well-known society gals are natural marks for jewelry thieves because they expose their considerable collection of diamonds in public places—restaurants, clubs, the opera, theater, at social functions, resorts, and other places where they may go.

Sophia Loren was victimized a few weeks after Zsa Zsa was robbed. A veritable gang of thugs armed with pistols took over the fashionable Hampshire House at 150 Central Park South in the wee hours of the morning, rounded up all the hotel personnel on duty at the time, put them under their guns, went up to the suite occupied by Miss Loren and rang the bell.

Carlo Ponti, Miss Loren's husband, had left for Italy the day before to attend the funeral of his father. The thieves must have known that.

The bell was answered by Sophia's secretary, Inez, who asked who was there.

"Maintenance department. We have a report that there is a gas leak and we want to check it."

Inez opened the door. As she did so she was thrown violently back into the room as one of the gunmen slammed the door into her.

What happened after that became

a nightmare. One of the gunmen struck Inez over the head with his pistol and opened a wound that bled profusely. The bandits then pushed Miss Loren around and threatened to harm her child unless she revealed the hiding place of her jewelry.

"We're not playing games, Miss Loren," one of the gunmen told her. "Hand over the jewelry or we're going to hurt that kid of yours. Now!"

That's all that Miss Loren had to hear. She gave up all her gems, almost a million dollars worth. The bandits left as quickly as they had come leaving two hysterical women behind them.

When Rosalie Levine, wife of Joe Levine, famed movie producer, came to the suite a short time later she was shaken by the mauling suffered by Sophia and Inez, who was lying on a bed. There was blood all over the place.

This has been the pattern, more or less, of most of the jewel robberies of recent years. Violence, beatings of the victims, threats of harm to children — gangster stuff right out of a cheap B-movie. Rough, crude, unimaginative, and totally lacking in the delicate skill employed by Arthur Barry, the most successful jewel thief of the century, a man who never harmed or threatened to hurt any of his victims. There was only one instance of violence in his entire career and that was when he escaped from prison.

The cash value of the robbery declared by a victim is rarely if ever

true. Even if it were it is far above that realized by the thief or thieves. Diamonds have a tremendous mark-up, usually about two hundred per cent. A \$600,000 declared theft, if true, is worth only \$200,000 in the wholesale market. However, a fence will pay only twelve to fifteen per cent of the wholesale value of hot diamonds. Assuming the thief gets fifteen per cent, it means that a \$600,000 score will net the boys only \$30,000.

That's not a bad day's pay. Yet the penalty faced is far and above the cash realized. Judges are tough on crooks who use violence in thefts, especially against women. A twenty years sentence is common.

If you divide twenty years into \$30,000 you get \$3,000 a year. That's less money than that earned by an unskilled laborer, plus the added discomfort of living in a narrow cell, regimented, restrained, deprived of all privileges enjoyed by the poorest man in the street.

Gerard Graham Dennis, dubbed the Super Raffles, came after Arthur Barry, copied some of his style but lacked his overall class. Dennis refused to deal with a fence because he wanted to get the full value for his hot gems. He differed from Barry in this respect too. Barry understood the risks run by fences. If caught taking hot jewels they were subject to a stiff prison term as well as loss of any loot they may have on hand. Furthermore, a fence took everything at one time, which left

Barry clean so far as being in possession of incriminating evidence. That was one thing Dennis didn't take into consideration.

Dennis, a handsome young Canadian, was, like Arthur Barry, a lover of the bright lights and pretty young ladies. Like Barry, his tastes ran to expensive clothes, champagne, slow nags and cold dice. He operated in Hollywood and the surrounding environs and in the New York area. His victims were movie stars, producers, writers, and other top-notch motion picture luminaries who made big money and whose wives possessed valuable gems.

Dennis took not only jewelry but furs, guns, cameras, and other items that could be turned into quick cash. This made him a burglar rather than strictly a jewel thief. Barry disdained everything but jewels.

The real professional thief, especially the jewel thief, makes arrangements with a fence to take whatever stuff he steals just as soon as he can get it to him. Dennis made the mistake of packing his Beverly Hills apartment with stolen goods. It proved to be his downfall.

Things got a little hot for Dennis in the Los Angeles area about this time so he told his pretty former school teacher, Betty V. Ritchie, that he had to get out of town for a while but would be in touch with her daily.

"I'm going East. I don't know how long I'll be gone but if you need any money until I get back I'll

wire it to you. Here's a thousand dollars. The rent on the apartment is paid for until March. That's four months from now."

Dennis settled in Rye, a fashionable suburban section outside of New York City, bought an expensive car, picked up with a divorcee named Eleanor Farrell, a good looking brunette, and began casing the homes in New Rochelle, and other Westchester suburban sites where the rich dwelled.

In New Rochelle he broke into the home of a wealthy boat builder named Marshal Tulloch, awakened him and demanded to know where he kept his money and his wife's jewels.

"You go to hell," Tulloch retorted. "I'm not telling you a damned thing. You want my money and my wife's jewels you find it. I'm calling the police!"

Dennis shot him neatly through the hand after which Tulloch lost his reluctance about revealing the whereabouts of his money and his wife's jewels and Dennis walked out of the house with a small fortune.

About six months later and as many robberies Dennis met Gloria Horowitz, the young wife of an out-of-work actor in a night club. Gloria was a little disenchanted with her actor-husband, who had been out of work for a couple of years and was willing to listen to anything the handsome and obviously wealthy young man would say to her.

"I'd like you to come with me to

Atlantic City. We can spend a couple of weeks there just lazying around and doing things. How does that appeal to you?"

"June fine," Gloria replied.

"Here's five hundred dollars. Pick up some odds and ends of clothes, bathing suits, beach robes, stuff like that. Meet me in the lobby of the Plaza tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. Okay?"

"Oh, Gerry, you're sweet! I love you! I'll be there. At nine sharp."

Dennis told Eleanor Farrell he had to go back to the Coast to take care of some business matters, kissed her good-by, and that was the last time he saw her.

Atlantic City was still wide open and Dennis spent a lot of time in the gambling casinos and at the race tracks. It wasn't long before he was short of cash. He checked out of the hotel with Gloria and went to Philadelphia and checked in with her at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel.

Several days later he said to her, "Honey, I'm a little short of cash. I have a valuable pair of diamond earrings that belonged to my dear mother, who left them to me. Take them down to Jewelry Row and offer them for sale. Ask for a thousand dollars."

Dennis underestimated the value of the earrings by at least three thousand dollars. Unaware that the earrings had been stolen, Gloria trotted into a store in Jewelry Row and offered the twin baubles for sale.



GERARD DENNIS.

The astonished jeweler said, "One thousand dollars? Uh, just a minute, please. I want to talk to my partner. Instead of talking to his partner he called the police, who arrested Gloria.

Dennis, who was standing across the street, saw Gloria being arrested and walked away, leaving her to take the rap. He checked out of the Benjamin Franklin as quickly as he could and headed back for the West Coast and Betty Ritchie.

Gloria meanwhile, after some extensive questioning, gave the cops their first good lead on Dennis.

At this time, a short, white-haired, red-cheeked man of fifty-eight, named Richard C. Murphy, a quiet-voiced lawyer and the unofficial district attorney for the nation's

retail jewelers, was studying the folder on Gerard Graham Dennis.

"Subject enters occupied homes at night time, in the best suburban residential sections, by means of unlocked windows or doors, or often climbs porches, to the second floor. Is very agile. Wears black mask and usually awakens his victims and demands their money, jewelry, furs and other valuables. Usually cuts or rips telephone wires. Carries a gun and is considered dangerous."

Murphy had a hand in solving virtually every major jewel crime in the United States for the past twenty-five years. Dennis' *modus operandi* coincided with numerous robberies, in Beverly Hills, New Rochelle, and in Westchester. The attempt to sell a pair of earrings to the Philadelphia dealer told Murphy that Dennis did not use a fence. How then did he dispose of his loot? Murphy came to one conclusion—to private jewelers, from coast to coast.

Dennis had made one other fatal mistake when he shacked up with Gloria. He gave her a snapshot of himself. The police snatched it away from her. Murphy got a print of it. He then circularized every jeweler he thought Dennis might contact in an effort to dispose of his hot gems.

The FBI also wanted him for the crime of transporting stolen goods across a state line and put up his mug in every post office in the country. Dennis didn't frequent post offices so was unaware he was on the FBI's list of wanted men.

Back in Beverly Hills, Dennis had business cards printed up which declared him to be a dealer in unset stones. Using these cards, he posed as a salesman, and always asked market prices for his gems. The small stores he stole had not been circularized so he made some sales. He actually didn't know that any of the jewelry stores had been circularized and confidently went his way in efforts to dispose of his loot.

In 1949 he was in Cleveland, walked into a jewelry store, one of the big ones, presented his card, and exposed his wares. The nephew of the jeweler to whom Dennis was trying to sell \$20,000 worth of stones thought he looked very like the man pictured on the police poster, excused himself on the pretext that he wanted to talk to his uncle about the gems and called the cops. The cops came in a matter of minutes, walked in with guns drawn.

"Okay," Dennis said, "you got me."

"That's right," one of the cops said.

"The ball game is over. Now, let's look you over." The cop patted him down and took a pistol from his belt. "You're a real smoothie, Dennis. A gun and everything. We always thought a professional jewel thief worked only chamois gloves and cat-like agility. I guess you're a bum after all. Let's go!"

After his arrest Dennis did a great deal of talking, admitting some robberies and denying others. He

led investigators to sixteen homes in Westchester from which he admitted stealing a total of more than \$100,000. He insisted that Gloria Horowitz was not involved at all in any of his robberies, nor was Betty Ritchie.

The cops refused to believe it. Police connected him with thefts in Westchester County totaling \$250,000. They added that loot found in his Beverly Hills apartment linked with robberies in robberies on the West Coast totaling more than \$300,000, and probably more.

Among the loot found in his Beverly Hills apartment was a mink jacket and \$32,000 worth of jewelry taken from the home of Loretta Young, a \$3,000 mink coat taken from the home of Mrs. Genevieve Phillips, a socialite, in Bel-Air, as well as furs and gems taken from other movie stars.

Police took a list from Dennis' wallet when they arrested him which contained the names of future victims, among them Jack Benny, Bette Davis, June Haver, Ginger Rogers, Louis B. Mayer, head of the MGM, and Mrs. Henry Kaiser, wife of the industrial tycoon.

Dennis' arrest, conviction, and sentence of twenty years gave Richard C. Murphy a lot of satisfaction, as much as did one of the biggest cases on record which he had solved, prosecuting and convicting Harry Cohn and the Arnow brothers, and recovering \$997,000 of an amazing \$1,116,000 haul.

It is possible that if Gerard Graham Dennis had known that Murphy was hot on his tail, and if he had known of Murphy's rep for nailing jewel thieves, he would have dumped what loot he had into the Pacific Ocean or into the East River and left for parts unknown. But that is one of the imponderables jewel thieves have to consider—the highly successful sleuth who has spent his life in tracking down criminals in specialized fields.

ARTHUR BARRY, the master of them all, gave Murphy a headache for many years. As a matter of fact, he gave the cops of New York enough headaches to have caused a bull market on aspirin. Dennis failed miserably in trying to emulate Barry, for Barry had few peers and no superiors.

Barry was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1896, the ninth of twelve children of immigrant Irish parents. He grew up in a typical Irish home, which means his parents were God-fearing, attended church regularly, lavished love and affection on all their children but were firm in their demand for obedience and respect.

Arthur Barry should have, according to the social theorists of today, turned out to be a lawyer, doctor, priest, or, that rarest of all birds, an honest politician. Instead he became the king of diamond thieves.

At thirteen, Barry was full-grown.

Instead of playing with boys his age he started to mix with boys his own size who were in the sixteen to eighteen age group. He was a nice kid, eager to please, and as eager to stay with the boys who were engaged in all sorts of exciting "games" such as burglary, snatching parcels from delivery trucks, and other activities which surpassed baseball, football, or basketball in thrills and was decidedly more gainful from a monetary standpoint.

He wasn't permitted to join in the burglaries but was allowed to help grab parcels from trucks. At this time he came to the attention of a master, an expert safecracker, named Lowell Jack.

Lowell Jack was in temporary retirement from his trade, a necessary choice because of a severe case of arthritis. He made his living by manufacturing special tools and nitroglycerin for those still in the business of cracking safes. The manufacture of nitroglycerin was a simple task. All you did was heat dynamite in a bucket of water and bottle the essence.

A half ounce medicine bottle of the stuff would blow open a dozen bank safes. It was a liquid that had to be handled with extreme care and caution. Jack needed a delivery boy who could be trusted to use the utmost prudence in his handling of the stuff lest it be dropped and do severe damage; and perhaps to a sundry hundred or so innocent bystanders. He was certain that young Barry

would fit the bill of delivery boy.

"Arthur," Lowell Jack said to Barry, "I've been watching you and I think you have the makings of a good man. I'm going to make you my partner. How do you like that?"

Barry was enthralled. "Gee, no kidding, Jack! What do I have to do?"

"Something very important." Lowell Jack explained the duties Arthur would have as his partner. "I'll pay you five dollars each time you deliver a small bottle for me. But remember, you must be very careful in handling this merchandise or you're liable to blow up all of Worcester and part of Boston."

"I'll be very careful, Jack. You can trust me."

"I'm sure of it. Okay. Come to the flat and I'll tell you about your first job."

In the next year, Lowell Jack sent Barry on trains to towns all over New England and he became a trusted member of the select small-time Worcester underworld. Looking at him as he sat in a train, dressed in knickers, a quiet, well-behaved youngster of fifteen, he presented the perfect picture of a well-bred, mannered lad. Who could ever guess he had a bottle of deadly nitroglycerin in his cotton-filled small suitcase.

Barry learned something at this stage of the game and never forgot it. Look the part and people will believe you are the part. It became his by-word and watch-word and it

stood him in good stead throughout the years of his criminal career.

Barry turned his first burglary trick at sixteen, a small job. He realized about \$100 from it but it indicated the deftness and the planning that he was to put into all his jobs from then on.

The victims were a middle-aged couple who ran a dry goods store. They brought home the day's receipts each evening. There were no night depositories in those days. Barry cased the house for several days while the couple worked in the store. He entered the house through an unlocked window and prowled about looking for the place where a middle-aged man who ran a dry goods store might hide his money. He was sure he found it, an empty desk drawer. It seemed to have a lingering scent of good old cash.

The night he decided on the burglary he crawled into the house through the unlocked window, went directly to the desk, opened the drawer. The money was there. He put the bills into his pocket and left as quietly as a cat through the open window.

He told Lowell Jack of his success with a certain amount of pride in his voice.

"Were you scared at all, lad?" Jack asked.

"Not a bit. If those people had awakened it wouldn't have mattered. I was wide awake all the time and they would have been groggy with sleep. I could have been six blocks

away before they got their sense together."

Lowell Jack smiled. "You're a cool one, lad. You'll make it, I'm sure. You case every job before you pull it and you'll have the advantage at all times. That's how most guys take a bust. No planning. They don't take the time to case the joint they're gonna take like they should. The means the place itself, the cop on the beat, the time he takes to make his rounds, how long before a patrol car comes around to check, if any, and the getaway. That's the most important thing of all.

"Getting the stuff is only half the job. Getting away clean is the other half. You remember that, lad, and you'll stay outta jail."

"I will, Jack. Don't worry."

Barry pulled about a dozen other minor jobs during the next year or so, and then World War I interrupted his activities. He joined the army, saw action, was wounded, and was recommended for the Silver Star but went AWOL before he could get it. After the war he settled in New York City.

Getting a legitimate job never occurred to him. He had made up his mind to being a thief. The only question was what kind of thief he would be.

He had learned a great deal about safe-cracking from Lowell Jack but the racket didn't appeal to him. Neither did robbing banks. Too rough. Ordinary burglary and stick-ups seemed to him to be hazardous

and unprofitable. Also disreputable. He didn't want to be a common thug who carried a gun.

Although he had only a high school education he had done a good deal of reading, was an excellent conversationalist, polished albeit a little rough around the edges. He decided on a specialty that rang the bell and had, as he termed it, class. Jewel theft.

He learned about a lot of fences in New York who would take a hot stove. Fences were everywhere during the 1920's. Also, there was a detective, a private eye, named Charles Noel Scaffa who was known in the underworld as The Man In Black. Scaffa had a reputation for being able to trade with the insurance companies that held the policies on jewels in six and seven figures.

When a thief stole valuable gems he would take them to Scaffa, who would contact the insurance company and offer to have the jewels returned for from twenty to twenty-five per cent of their insured value. This was better than a total loss for the company and they usually agreed to the deal.

Barry figured he could realize at least five per cent more on the value of the jewels by dealing with Scaffa. He didn't care what percentage Scaffa got so long as he got from fifteen to twenty per cent of the total value of the jewels for his end.

Having made a decision as to what he would steal, the next step

was to decide whom he would steal it from. He noticed that a lot of wealthy women who came into New York City to shop would wind up their afternoons at the casino in Central Park. He bought a wardrobe of tailored suits and all the accessories, dressed with care each day, and visited the casino.

His good looks, air of gentility, and his seeming interest in nothing but the drink in front of him added rather than detracted from his appeal for those ladies who had an eye out for a handsome young man. It is very likely that he could have made many liaisons with wealthy women who would have been glad to keep him in the style to which he wanted to become accustomed, but he had a one-track mind and it was focused on stealing jewels.

When he spotted a woman who had a lot of diamonds on her person he would follow her to her limousine and take the license number. He then would call the traffic bureau.

"This is Patrolman Foster, badge number 865911. I've got an accident up here and I need the name and address of Cadillac limousine with New York plate number YD-5161.

"The traffic bureau never took the time to check on Patrolman Foster but simply gave him the name and address of the owner of the car. The rest was simple. He would case the home, determine the location of the bedrooms, the time the occupants went to bed, or if they went

out on certain evenings. And then he would pull the job.

Barry also scanned the society columns for announcements of engagement parties or weddings in the estate section of the North Shore area on Long Island. On the afternoon of a party he would drive out to the Island, park his car near the estate in question, change into formal clothes and crash the party. Lawn parties were particularly easy for him because he had only to climb unnoticed over a wall or through a hedge, pick up a drink and a canape from a passing waiter and mingle with the guests.

It took nerve but that was one thing Arthur Barry had in great amounts. Once on the grounds, it was easy for him to get into the house, wander upstairs and make a mental sketch of the floor plan.

On many occasions, Barry was able to enter the master bedroom and locate probable hiding places for jewelry. He never stole anything on these scouting expeditions. He would unlock a half-dozen windows in strategic spots, hoping they would remain unlocked for a day or two. If there was a burglar alarm system he would disconnect it.

On a couple of occasions he was discovered wandering about the house and pretended he was drunk and looking for a place to lie down. No one ever challenged him. He never lost his cool and his stage presence was remarkable, his taste in clothes excellent and his grammar

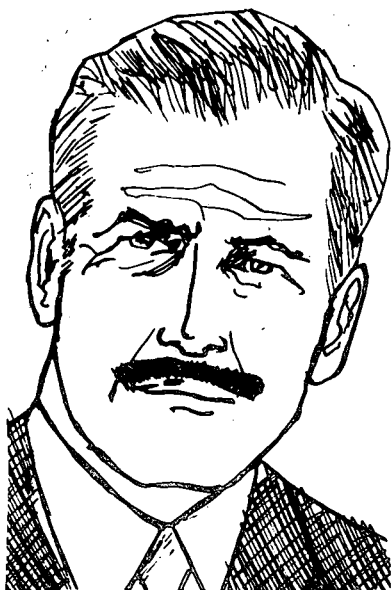
good enough to fool the King of England—which, as a matter of fact, it did, when the present Duke of Windsor was Prince of Wales.

Barry ran into the then Prince of Wales one evening at a plush speak-easy on 59th Street and made a very favorable impression on him. They had several drinks together in the course of the evening, during which time the prince chatted gaily and perhaps a little too informatively.

A few days later, early on the morning of September 9, 1924, a thief entered the home of Mrs. Joshua Cosden at Sands Point, Long Island and made off with about \$150,000 worth of jewels. Some of the stuff belonged to guests of the Cosdens, the prince's cousin, Lord Louis Mountbatten and his wife. It was almost as if someone, in the vulgar vernacular, had fingered the job.

There was no insurance deal on this job, so Barry had to deal with a fence. The best he could get was twelve per cent. The jewels were in the form of pins, brooches, necklaces, and compound pieces inlaid with a great many small stones which reduced their value when the pieces were broken up. The \$18,000 he realized could not support him too long in the style in which he now lived and so he looked around for another job—three jobs, as a matter of fact.

He robbed the homes of Social Registerite John C. Greenleaf of Hewlett Bay Park, Long Island, and



ARTHUR BARRY

took \$10,000 worth of jewels, stopped at the residence of Mr. Harold E. Talbott, who would someday become President Eisenhower's Secretary of the Air Force, and got \$23,000 worth of gems, and then paid a visit to the home of Tommy Hitchcock, world famous polo player, and got \$9,000.

During this period he was averaging about \$500,000 a year in thefts, which netted him about \$65,000, enough to satisfy his needs and those of the many show dolls who flocked to him, believing him to be a millionaire. He spent money faster than most millionaires and was a welcome patron in the best cafes, restaurants, and clubs. Never by any

word or act did he let slip the means and manner of his income. Discretion was his religion and caution his priest.

Barry extended his territory into Dutchess County in New York, and in that area in 1926, he pulled off a job that aroused real awe in police circles. It must first be remembered that Barry stood only five feet eight inches in height and weighed no more than 150 pounds.

Barry discovered that the master and mistress of a large estate kept their jewelry in a 150-pound safe in their bedroom closet. Barry climbed into the bedroom on a ladder, tipped to the closet and silently hoisted the safe on his shoulder. With the safe on his back he made his way down the ladder, across the grounds and to his car.

This kind of astonishing bravado, silence and deftness, also characterized the greatest lone-handed jewel robbery in the history of American crime.

Early in the evening of September 30, 1925, Barry entered the Fifth Avenue apartment of Mrs. Jessie Donahue, of the Woolworth family, and left with diamonds and other jewels worth \$650,000. Only \$114,000 of the total was covered by insurance. It was the greatest haul of the century. New York police, prodded by the newspapers, went to work feverishly.

Noel Scaffa, *The Man In Black*, also called *The Great Retriever*, representing one of the insurance

companies, made a routine check and went back to his modest office to sit by the telephone. He had sandwiches and coffee sent up while he kept his vigil for several days and nights. Finally, the phone rang and a voice said:

"I want the Man In Black."

"You've got him," Scaffa answered, fighting off the excitement in his voice. "Go ahead."

On October 6, one week after the robbery, Scaffa walked into the lobby of an East Side hotel alone, and met a man who, he later said, identified himself as Sam Baxter.

"We had a short conversation, about three or four minutes," Scaffa told detectives, "and we exchanged packages. That's all I can tell you."

"What was in the packages?" one of the detectives demanded.

"I can't tell you that."

"The diamonds and a payoff?" the detective persisted.

"I can't tell you."

"Okay, Scaffa. We'll let it pass for now but we're going to talk to you again. Soon."

Another week passed, during which time detectives picked up numerous suspects and stool pigeons. No one knew a thing. Then, on October 13, Noel Scaffa delivered a package containing all the jewels, \$650,000 worth, to an insurance company and the papers broke the story of the sensational recovery while the cops were still seeking the thieves. The situation made the cops look bad and they went after Scaffa.

Scaffa was speedily indicted for compounding a felony but it was a year before the case came to trial. The jury disagreed. A second trial was ordered. After the prosecution had presented its case, Judge Levine, on motion of defense counsel, directed a verdict of acquittal.

Two things happened during the trials that convinced jewel thieves that Noel Scaffa was the man with whom to deal. One, it was revealed that he had given the mysterious Sam Baxter \$65,000 in small bills for the jewels. Two, he repeatedly refused to identify Sam Baxter, holding to the premise that as a private detective he maintained the same right as that of a doctor or lawyer in refusing to divulge anything about a client.

Among the jewels taken in this robbery was a rope of pearls valued at \$450,000. These were taken from a dressing table in Mrs. Donahue's bedroom while she sat in a tub in a bathroom only a few feet away. A maid was in a nearby room and a masseuse in another. No one heard a sound.

"Whoever took those pearls," a detective remarked at the time, "really knew what he was doing. There were five ropes in the drawer, four imitations and the real one. The imitations were good enough to fool an oyster."

Barry knew the easy way to distinguish between a real pearl and an imitation. You rub the pearl across your teeth. A real pearl pro-

duces a somewhat grating, sand-papery sensation. A fake pearl is smooth and slippery.

ARTHUR BARRY went on his merry way, living the life of a millionaire, wining and dining beautiful show girls from the best Broadway musicals. He was especially attracted to three of the most attractive chorus girls in New York who were appearing in the hit musical *Blossom Time*. Because he couldn't make up his mind he dated all three at the same time—Roz, Rhoda, and Carol.

The girls persuaded him to add a fourth to the trio, a beauteous redhead named Michele Michaels. Michele fell madly in love with the handsome, debonair, wild spending "millionaire". She wanted him for herself, wanted him to marry her, and she was jealous of her three friends.

Barry soothed her with gifts and vague promises. She would go to his apartment after he took the other girls home, ring his bell and plead to be let in. There were times when Barry wouldn't answer her ring and she would knock on the door and cry that she knew he was inside and would he please, please let her come in. She was to prove his undoing. Hell, it has been said, has no fury like a woman scorned.

Barry soon ran out of money again and went to the only source he knew to replenish his bankroll. He stole about \$100,000 in jewels from the home of Julius Lichten-

stein. Scaffa again came into the picture several days later.

"Meet me in the bar of the Regency Hotel on Park Avenue and 61st Street," he told Mrs. Lichtenstein.

They had a cocktail in the bar, during which time the anguished Mrs. Lichtenstein asked him if he believed she would get back her jewels.

"I'm quite sure of it. Since they are not insured and you stand to lose the full value you can save yourself a considerable amount by ransoming the jewelry. The price is \$20,000. That's what I was told."

"And your fee, Mr. Scaffa?"

Noel Scaffa smiled briefly. "Nothing, Mrs. Lichtenstein. I shall consider it a favor to be of service."

"You are very kind. When do you wish me to bring the money?"

"Now."

"I'll call my husband."

A messenger delivered a package to the bar and handed it to Mrs. Lichtenstein, who turned it over to Scaffa. The two then returned to her hotel.

"Look in your bureau drawer," Scaffa told her.

She opened the drawer, and there in a neat package reposed every item of her jewelry. This was another instance of Barry's daring, first to steal the jewels and then, in an outrageous display of bravado, return them to the exact place from where he took them.

Barry next robbed Mrs. Edgar F.

Luckenbach of \$200,000 in gems, again from a suite in a hotel located in the exclusive Central Park South area. The jewels were discovered several days later in a taxicab that was parked outside Mrs. Luckenbach's hotel, after she had paid Noel Scaffa \$30,000 to get them back.

The only one of his one hundred and fifty major thefts for which Barry finally was prosecuted, convicted, and jailed was the theft of \$100,000 in jewelry from the home of Jesse Livermore, the Wall Street operator, whose summer home was in Kings Point, Long Island. It took place early in the morning of May 29, 1927. The Livermores had some house guests at the time. Barry robbed them too.

He entered the house by a ladder which he placed beneath a second-story window and climbed up. He entered the room occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Aronsohn. The Aronsohns awakened immediately.

"Good evening," Barry said, speaking in a low and gentle tone. "I've come only to take the jewelry, not to hurt anyone. Please don't be upset."

He then walked to the bedside table and cut the telephone wires.

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Aronsohn said. "I feel ill. I think I am going to faint."

"Please don't, madam," Barry said. "Would you care for an aspirin?"

"I believe I would," Mrs. Aronsohn said.

She got up and went to the medicine cabinet in the bathroom while Barry picked up the jewelry on the dressing table. It was not a large haul, worth about \$5,000, and included an object that Barry rarely bothered to steal, a wrist watch. However, the watch and its band were of platinum. Barry appraised them at \$1,500.

"Please don't take my nickel-plated watch," Mr. Aronsohn said. "It was a gift from my mother."

Barry smiled. Nickel-plated? "Very well," he replied. "I had a mother myself and I valued anything she gave me. If you cooperate, I may leave it with the Livermores on my way out."

He warned the Aronsohns not to make any outcry or approach the window. "I have some companions out there with guns who are apt to shoot if you poke your head out. Please don't. I should hate to have them shoot you."

Mrs. Aronsohn was thoroughly cowed now and began to whimper a little. Barry soothed her.

"You just stay in bed, madam, and nothing will happen to you."

Barry then went to the Livermore's bedroom and awakened Mrs. Livermore by shining his flashlight in her eyes. She didn't scream. She just said, "Who is it?"

"It's only a burglar, Mrs. Livermore. I've come for your jewels."

Livermore woke up then, looked at Barry and blinked.

"Good evening, J. L.," Barry said evenly.

This burned Jesse Livermore. Only his close friends called him by the initials of his name. His wife, who was about twenty years his junior, called him Pops.

"Don't reach for the phone, J. L. The wires are cut," Barry informed him. "All I want is the jewelry and I'll be on my way."

"It's on the dresser, damn you!" Livermore replied. "Take the damned stuff and get the hell out of here!"

Barry took about \$100,000 worth of gems from the dressing table and bureau, noticing as he searched through the drawers that Mrs. Livermore seemed uncomfortable. She was sitting up in bed wearing only a nightgown but was too frightened to reach for her robe. Barry picked it up and put it around her shoulders.

"You're a devil," Mrs. Livermore said as Barry draped the robe around her shoulders. "A veritable devil."

"Thank you, madam," Barry replied, and gave her a courtly bow. "Would you like a cigarette?"

"Yes, I would," she replied testily.

He gave her one and lit it for her. He asked Livermore if he would like a cigarette.

"I smoke cigars!" Livermore retorted harshly. "I told you to take the damned jewelry and to get the hell out of here!"

"Please don't take my little pinky ring," Mrs. Livermore said. "Pops gave it to me."

Barry appraised it about \$15,000 but he tossed the ring to her. She thanked him.

"Oh, and please don't take Pop's little pinky ring," Mrs. Livermore said. "I gave that to him."

Barry looked at the ring, calculated the value at about \$20,000. He said, "Mrs. Livermore, if you keep this up I'll be losing money on this job. But, here it is." He tossed the ring to her.

"I think I'll quit while I'm ahead," he said. "Oh, one more thing. Would you mind giving this nickel-plated platinum watch to Mr. Aronsohn? His mother gave it to him." He tossed the watch to Mrs. Livermore, bowed. "Good night, and please don't be upset."

He bowed to both of them and left. He was out of the house and off the grounds before Jesse Livermore got out of bed to find a phone that was still in use so he could call police.

He converted the hot jewels into cash through a fence and took his quartet of beauties on rounds of clubs. Michele Michaels again was frantic because Barry wouldn't promise her to give up the other three girls and confine himself to her alone, with or without the bonds of marriage.

Barry decided to leave town for a while. Michele was too much of a problem and could cause trouble or,

at the least, embarrassment. He wanted to avoid both at all costs.

Michele, however, had that womanly sixth sense, read the papers, and figured out by that strange process of mind women seem to have and function by that Barry was a crook and that he had robbed the Livermore residence.

As he was getting ready to board a train at the station in Ronkonkoma, Long Island, at 7:30 o'clock on this summer Sunday evening he was arrested by a squad of detectives. Unfortunately for him, and for the first time in his career as a jewel thief, he had a couple of pieces in his possession from the Livermore job. On the train back to New York he asked one of the detectives how they got a line on him.

One of the detectives grinned. "Figure it out Barry. You're a pretty smart guy."

Barry did. But how the hell Michele could come to the kind of conclusion she did was beyond him. Womanly intuition and the kind of jealousy that will lead a woman to kill the man she loves. He grinned back at the detective.

"Okay. I figured it out. You don't have to admit it but I'll say the name of the person who fingered me. Michele Michaels."

The detective grinned back wordlessly.

Barry refused to talk about any of his jobs, refused to say anything except that his name was Arthur

Barry and that he was a homeless waif with no address.

One of the detectives was about to tell him that they knew about his plush apartment but thought better of it because if he said that then Barry would know that Michele Michaels had fingered him, and he no doubt had friends who would want to do something about Michele's overactive leanings toward conversations with cops.

The district attorney who was assigned to the case asked that a high bail be set so that Barry could be confined pending trial and to keep him from stripping the town's dowagers of their jewels. The judge complied.

Barry was tried, convicted, and sentenced to twenty-five years in Auburn Prison, one of the hell holes of the New York State penal system, at the time.

The harsh, brutal, warped, and soul stinging life in a narrow prison cell grated on Barry's nerves day after day and night after night. He dreamed of the beauty of Roz, Rhoda, and Carol, the way they smiled and laughed, the fascination of their joy at being with him, and he tossed restlessly in his hard bunk. He still remembered the warmth of Michele's body and cursed her.

This was the whip that cut scars into his body, that she could bring him to this because of her love. It was a strange love, a love that sought to punish and destroy, and for no damage that was done to her.

He thought and dreamed of escape. He thought of the tasteless, flat food served up in aluminum plates and recalled to his mind the gleaming silver, beautiful china, linen tablecloths, and the soft lights and impeccable service he had known in the world's finest restaurants where the food was like ambrosia. *Escape!* He had to escape from this hell hole or blow his top.

On a warm but cloudy Sunday afternoon on July 28, 1929, the 1700 convicts imprisoned in the Auburn penitentiary were in the yard. This was the recreation period and the inmates were allowed the freedom of the yard as well as the cell blocks. This was the day, Arthur Barry told himself.

At the end of the cell block where Barry was housed was a solid steel door containing a mail slot. Beyond this door was a guard room, and beyond that, by a grievous error of prison design, was an arsenal full of guns and ammunition. There were only two guards in the room between the cell block and the arsenal, and one of them had the key to the arsenal in his pocket.

Barry induced one of the inmates working in the bakery to make a birthday cake for him, and asked the inmate in charge of the recreation equipment shack to give him a tennis ball. Barry punctured the tennis ball and filled it with ammonia from the prison laundry. He was all set.

Carrying the cake in one hand,

the tennis ball in the other, Barry tapped with his foot on the steel door at the end of his cell block. One of the guards peered through the mail slot. All he could see was Barry's head, shoulders, and the cake. Three other inmates, who were to make the escape with Barry, crouched beside the door and were out of the guard's field of vision.

Barry said, "I have a birthday cake for Mike Selden. He's in the next cell block. Would you please take this and give it to the guard for Mike?"

The guard unlocked the door to take the cake and as he did so Barry squirted his face with the ammonia from the tennis ball. The guard cried out and covered his face with his hands. Barry and his three companions dashed past the guard and made for the second guard, who sat in a chair, his gun across his knees, at the opposite end of the room.

The group overpowered him and took his rifle and the keys to the arsenal. They quickly armed themselves with riot guns, pistols, and machine guns. Barry then stepped out onto a balcony which jutted off the guard room above the yard, raised his gun and fired a shot into the air.

"We're breaking out! Anybody wants to come along, come now!"

A wild shout went up from the prisoners, who began to race to the cell block where Barry and his three companions stood. As the mass of convicts stormed into the building

from one side, Barry and his three companions dashed out the other and headed toward the main gate.

As they ran they fired bursts from their riot guns at the guards who manned the 20-foot wall which enclosed the prison. The guards ducked and were able to return only scattered and very inaccurate fire. Barry reached the locked gate and dashed into the "balky," a tower which housed a winding staircase leading to the top of the wall. He climbed it so quickly that he later had no recollection of having climbed it at all. He emerged on top of the wall and stood for an instant, surveying the long drop down to the street.

He was a perfect target for some of the guards' guns. One of the guards triggered off a shot that caught Barry in the lower leg and nicked the shin-bone but did not break it. Another bullet smashed into his back, high up, above the lung. He turned and dropped over the wall, still carrying his gun in one hand. As he hit the sidewalk his left foot struck a six-inch stone sill at the base of the wall and he toppled over backward. He got up quickly, felt a sharp pain in the foot. Two bones were broken.

Inside the prison all hell broke loose as the rampaging cons sought ways and means of breaking out of the prison. A great many of the cons went berserk when they found avenues of escape blocked. They set fire to buildings, broke windows,

smashed equipment with hammers and axes, and those who had been able to arm themselves shot at guards who happened to be in sight.

Two convicts were shot and killed — Joseph Cirrongone, serving a sentence of from seven and one-half to fifteen years for arson, and George Wright, serving a sentence of fifteen years for first degree robbery. Both men were sentenced from Erie County. Four guards were seriously wounded in the uprising. They were William Dempey, Eugene Fasce, Merle Osborne, and Thomas Wallace. Patrick F. Morrissey, Captain of the Auburn Fire Department, was shot in the head. Eleven other prisoners were wounded.

The fire damage was later estimated to be \$250,000. The buildings destroyed by fire included the furniture plant, cane shop, prison kitchen, machine shop, and the Bertillon Room or Identification Division where all the documents of criminal records of the inmates were kept. The license plate factory was damaged also but firemen succeeded in saving it from utter ruin.

While the melee was at its height state troopers, armed with pistols and machine guns trained on the rioters, dropped from the walls into the seething yard and helped the prison guards drive the milling swarm from behind improvised barricades into corners.

Warden Edgar S. Jennings, a brigadier general in the New York



RICHARD D. MURPHY

national guard, ordered three companies of the 108th infantry under arms to aid the state troopers and the prison guards in quelling the riot. The mobilization order was confirmed by Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Company I, Headquarters Company, and the Regimental Service Company reported to the prison but took no part in the fight, deploying themselves outside the prison in order to prevent further escapes.

At this time it was not known how many prisoners had escaped. Along with Arthur Barry, those who escaped were Joseph Caprico, who was serving twenty years for robbery in the 2nd Degree, Steve Pawlak, serving a life term as an habitual offender on a fourth offense, and

George Small, serving twelve years for robbery in the 2nd Degree.

With Barry was Steve Pawlak, twenty-nine years old, a confirmed hood and thief, who also was armed with a riot gun and a pistol. Joe Caprico and George Small teamed together as soon as they gained their freedom and separated from Barry and Pawlak.

Sunday afternoon traffic outside the prison had halted and the street, one of the main thoroughfares of Auburn, was clogged. Some of the cars stopped momentarily for a quick look and moved on slowly because of the traffic jam.

Barry and Pawlak leaped into an automobile driven by Jacob Reese of Auburn, who had his wife and four-year-old son with him.

"Mister," Barry said, "we don't want to hurt you, your wife or kid; if you do what you're told. Drive slowly, or as fast as the traffic ahead of you is moving. Don't try to signal anyone and don't make any funny moves. Understand?"

"I understand," Reese replied. "Just don't get involved in any shooting with anyone while you're in this car and I'll obey your instructions."

"We won't. Don't worry about it. Just keep moving as you are. Just like that."

All attention was focused on the rioting inside the prison and so no one paid any attention to the escapees. Firemen from Auburn, Skaneateles, Port Byron, and Syracuse,

twenty-six miles away, had sped to the prison to aid in putting out the fires and they braved the bullets of the cons who were bent on burning down the entire prison. The firemen were rendered all but helpless by prisoners who cut the water lines with butcher knives and axes seized from the kitchen and supply shed.

Outside the town of Auburn, Barry and Pawlak forced Jacob Reese, his wife and son, out of the car and headed for Syracuse. When they reached the suburbs of Syracuse, Barry spotted a house that seemed to be unoccupied. He drove the Reese car into the empty garage and closed the door to hide the auto from any view of the road. The two men broke into the house and headed for the bathroom. In the medicine closet they found peroxide, tape, and bandages for Barry's wounds.

He had lost blood but not enough to weaken him to any degree. His stamina was remarkable. In a clothes closet they found a suit that just happened to fit Pawlak. The outfit that Barry could get together consisted of a pair of golf knickers, loud golf socks, a sweater, and a cap.

"You'll get away with that outfit for about two minutes, or less," Pawlak said.

"What the hell can I do?" Barry surveyed himself in a mirror. "I don't even look like a golfer, and I wouldn't know a niblick from a

caddy." He looked the clothes over and decided to put them on.

In order to put on the golf socks he had to remove his shoes, and as soon as he did so he realized the mistake he had made. The broken toes swelled up like a couple of thick salamis. He got his foot into the sock somehow but he foot would go only half way into the shoe. He doubled up the broken toes underneath and forced his foot into the shoe.

"I can hear your bones grating," Pawlak said.

"I can feel them!" Barry retorted, and grimaced with pain. "If I make it with this foot it will be a miracle."

"You better hope those two bullet wounds don't get any worse than they are or you'll be in real trouble."

"Yeah, I know. I just said a good old Irish prayer to St. Dismas. If he ever helped another good thief I hope he answers my prayer. I sure as hell need his help now."

They set out on foot, Barry walking painfully, as they sought a car they could steal. They located one in a garage beside a large house. They hid in a ditch beneath the road and waited for night. A half hour after the lights went out in the house they made their way to the garage. Barry got behind the wheel and Pawlak got in beside him.

"No good," Barry said. "If we start the car here they'll hear it. Steve, get out and push the car onto the road. When we get a little way down the road we'll start it up."

Pawlak got out and started to push the car. He got the car about fifteen feet out of the garage when a shot exploded and a slug came tearing through the windshield. A man on the second floor was aiming a gun straight at Barry. Another shot slammed through the windshield. It missed Barry but splintering glass filled both his eyes. He was blind!

Steve Pawlak panicked when the first shot rang out and he dashed out from the back of the car, ran around the far side, away from the direction where the shots were coming from, and onto the road where he disappeared. Barry never saw him again.

Alone, and with a gun trained on him, Barry pried open one of his eyes, started the car with the other hand and sped out of the driveway, steering with one hand while he held his eye open with the other. The owner of the house fired three more shots at the disappearing car but missed with all three.

Barry drove at a speed of fifty to sixty miles an hour, without lights, blind in one eye and still holding the other open with his fingers.

The shots that Barry thought had missed the car didn't. One of the slugs punctured the gas tank and soon the car sputtered to a stop. He stumbled through the damp night, the pain in his foot excruciating, his eyes smarting, and his wounds beginning to act up.

He plodded along, only half see-

ing, fell into a flower bed and covered himself with mud. It was now four o'clock in the morning, pouring rain, and he was getting weaker all the time. He managed to get the mud off himself, survived the night, and reached the center of town. He had to get to Albany, where he had friends who would help him, and by some miracle he did when a truck driver picked him up and drove him all the way into the city.

Friends took him in, got a doctor who treated his wounds, rested him for a couple of weeks until he was fully recovered, gave him money. He had grown a mustache and altered his appearance with a pair of horn-rimmed glasses. He decided to go to New Jersey.

The heat was still on him and he was being sought all over the country as a fugitive. He was reported seen in New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Dallas, Los Angeles, and in San Francisco. This, he felt, was to his advantage. The more places the cops looked for him the less chance they would have to find him where he was going.

He settled in a small town not too far from Flemington, New Jersey. And here fate worked against him. He took the name of James Toner and got a job as a salesman of automobile parts. He stayed clean, committed no burglaries, and behaved like a decent citizen. He was accepted as such by those who came to know him.

On the night of October 22, 1932,

there was a pounding on his door.

"Police officers! Open up!"

Barry's heart fell. So it had come at last. After three years of freedom he again would have to face life in a prison cell. He knew there was no chance of escape because the cops no doubt had the house surrounded. He opened the door.

The amazing thing that happened next confounded him. The cops and the FBI were checking every town near Flemington on all new residents for suspects in the kidnaping of the Lindbergh baby. Charles Lindbergh, the first man to fly solo in a prop airplane across the Atlantic Ocean, was an international hero and the kidnaping of his son had aroused the world. The manhunt for the kidnaper was intense.

The cops and the FBI agents questioned him in his home and because his answers were evasive decided to take him downtown for further questioning. When his fingerprints were taken and checked he was unmasked. It was irony of the cruellest sort for him.

For a time he was the prime suspect in the case along with some six or seven other major crimes that had taken place during the time he was free from Auburn Prison. After a close scrutiny, Dr. J. F. "Jafsie" Condon, the celebrated middleman in the kidnaping, said that Barry was not the man to whom he had paid the ransom money.

Detectives from all over the country came to the jail to question Bar-

ry about crimes that had been committed in their cities. A detective from Greenwich, Connecticut, also was among those who came to question Barry. He believed that Barry had robbed the Percy Rockefeller home in Greenwich in 1926 and he wanted to know how Barry had been able to do it.

"I didn't do it," Barry declared. "I never pulled a job in Greenwich. I wouldn't know Rockefeller's house from a dog-house."

"Look, Arthur," the detective said, "we're alone in this room. I'm not going to say now that you did it or didn't do it, but let me tell you about it. The Rockefeller home is surrounded by a big stone wall, and between the wall and the house there are two of the toughest watchdogs you ever saw.

"I went out there with a couple of other detectives and we tried to go over the wall, just to see if it was possible, and the dogs damned near killed us. Now, if you were going to get into a place like that, what would you do?"

"Well, let me put it this way. Understand now that this is strictly hypothetical. I'd get some meat, a good piece of steak, and throw it over the wall and see what happened."

"Suppose the dogs didn't go for the meat? Then what would you do next?"

Barry grinned. "Well, if I really was intent on robbing that place and couldn't persuade the dogs to go

for the meat trick I would go to a kennel and I'd buy a female dog in heat. Then I'd tie a rope around her collar, tie the other end to a tree outside the wall, and I'd lower the pooch over the wall. After about five minutes or so I'd climb over the wall myself, walk into the house and grab the jewelry. On the way out, so there wouldn't be any evidence, I'd pull my dog up over the wall after me, and drive back to New York."

The detective burst into laughter. "Barry, that's the best I've heard yet. Okay, you settled something for me. I'm going to send you a good box of cigars."

Barry was returned to prison, sick at heart, hating all that he knew he would face. He faced it too. The prison authorities made it real tough for him because they blamed him for starting the riot, which, in fact, he did. He was thrown into solitary confinement and spent the next five years there talking to himself. He had a lot of time to think things over and told himself that if he had it to do all over again he would have never stolen a thing in his life. The rewards were good but the penalty for them was extremely bad.

One good thing came out of the result of his escape. G. W. Alger, Special Commissioner on Prison Affairs, was moved to refer to the cells and conditions at Auburn as atrocious and urged that the prison be abandoned. Some changes were

made but the prison was not shut down.

Barry spent the next seventeen years in prison, most of them in the Attica institution to where he was transferred after his release from solitary confinement. He was paroled in 1949 and went home to Worcester, where he got a job in a restaurant as a waiter, given him by a boyhood friend who operated a chain of four such establishments.

A Worcester detective said several years after Barry's release that he thought he would never live to see the day when Arthur Barry would do an honest day's work.

"I've seen it," the detective said, "and there's no doubt of it. Barry is not only honorably employed but has some active extracurricular interests as well. With members having full knowledge of his past, Barry was elected commander of a local veterans' organization, a position he served well."

"I am not good at drawing morals," Barry said when he was asked for a personal observation on

crime and its effects on the criminal, "and I don't want to bore anyone, but I would like to say this. When I was a young man I had many assets. I was not only intelligent. I was clever. I got along well with people on any level and, if I do say so, had guts. I could have gone anywhere—to Wall Street, maybe—and made an honest fortune.

"So, when you put down all those burglaries, be sure you put down the big one at the top. Not Arthur Barry robbed Jesse Livermore, or Arthur Barry robbed the cousin of the King of England, but just that Arthur Barry robbed Arthur Barry."

And that explains the greatest jewel thief of this century. He was a man with a great deal of imagination and daring, a man who never harmed any of his victims. The only violence in which he was ever involved was in his escape from prison. In that it may be said that he can be excused. Freedom is a precious jewel, the most precious a man can own. Ask the man who has lost it!



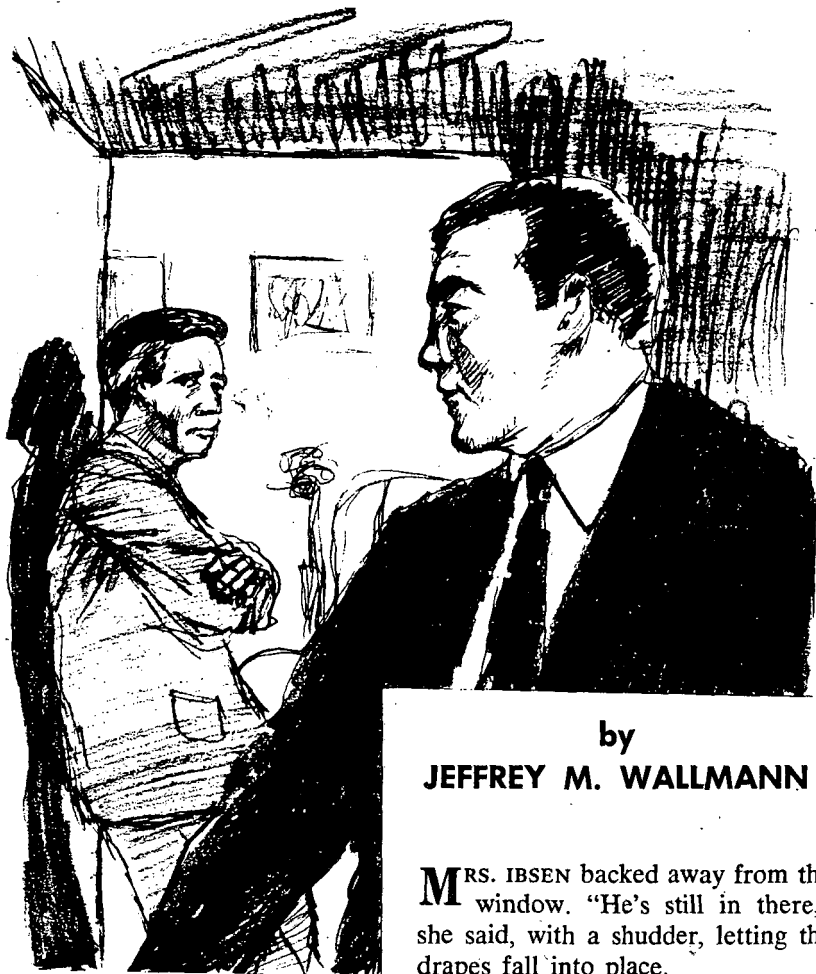
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by

JEFFREY M. WALLMANN

MRS. IBSEN backed away from the window. "He's still in there," she said, with a shudder, letting the drapes fall into place.

Detective second grade Hal Devlin stood at the window next to her and continued to peer at the window in the apartment house across from them. He was a big man, with a barrel chest and thick arms and legs. He had black crew-cut hair and brown eyes and a nose which had been mashed to his face by a baseball bat when he had been a patrolman.

"I can see the reflection of his binoculars," he said.

His partner for the week, Detective third grade Worth, stubbed his cigarette out in a nearby ashtray. He wasn't much of a contrast to Devlin, for he had brown eyes and black hair as well. But somehow people kept taking him to be the senior partner, which always rankled Devlin a bit. He eyed Mrs. Ibsen and said, "And you say you have no idea who the person is?"

"None," Mrs. Ibsen replied. "I don't even know all the tenants in this building, much besides those in South Tower. You know how it is—so many people together, privacy is sacred. All I can tell you is that I saw him spying on us two days ago, and he's never stopped. I don't even think he sleeps, just sits in that window and watches.

"I would have reported him sooner, but I wanted to make sure before I accused one of the tenants of being a Peeping Tom."

She sat down in a chair heavily, a middle-aged widow about twenty pounds overweight, with dyed silver

hair rolled into a bun and bland, round features. She was wearing a sleeveless spring dress, and the meat under her arms swayed as she talked, for she gestured with her hands in quick, jerky motions.

"You understand, don't you?" she continued. "The Acreage is supposedly a model community, with security guards and screening of applicants and very high rent. I wanted to be positive."

Devlin understood. The Acreage was less than a year old, one of those planned oases of respectability in the middle of an urban wasteland called a city.

He fingered the fine material of the drapes and recalled his first impression of sterile good taste when he had entered her apartment fifteen minutes before. He was pretty sure all the other apartments in The Acreage were exactly like hers, right down to the furniture arrangement.

A person moving into The Acreage forsook his individuality, his identity, his memories, for there was nothing in one's past worth salvaging. The past was a jumble of clash, of worry and strain. Here, life was ordered and safe. One belonged, like cubes in an ice tray.

Devlin was glad that his family and he still lived in that white elephant of a house. He liked having a past.

Worth turned to Devlin. "I'll talk to the super."

"Do that," Devlin replied. He let

the drapes fall. "And get a pass key from him, too."

"Right." Worth paused to light one of his chain link cigarettes, then left. Devlin smiled at Mrs. Ibsen, trying to reassure her that she had done the proper thing by reporting the man, and then he said, "About this other matter. You want us to investigate it?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Ibsen said, frowning slightly. "I—"

A bell sounded from the kitchen. Mrs. Ibsen rose from the chair. "Excuse me. My pie is done. We can talk in the kitchen."

Devlin followed her into the small kitchen which was at the rear of the eighteen-by-twenty-four living room. The other end of the living room was all glass and draped and was where the woman and he had been standing moments earlier. Next to the kitchen were a small hall, the entrance foyer, and another hall leading to the two bedrooms and the bath.

Mrs. Ibsen opened the oven door and removed a steaming pie. "All I can tell you is that Lenore Grimond seems to have disappeared."

"Disappeared," Devlin echoed. He watched as she placed the pie carefully on the counter, using the empty frozen pie box as a pad.

The rest of the kitchen looked as though it was unused. The stainless steel sink was spotless, the counters shone, and the pseudo walnut cabinets and trim were as though waxed and buffed. Even the inside

of the warm oven gleamed, and Devlin realized it was a self-cleaning model.

"Yes. Lenore is probably my oldest and dearest friend. We've known each other long before we moved here. In fact, it was my doing that her husband and she came to The Acreage.

"They live in seven-twelve, which makes it very convenient. Anyway, I was supposed to meet Lenore for lunch on Monday at the beauty shop she manages. She wasn't there and none of the girls had seen her since closing on Saturday. Here it is Wednesday, and I haven't heard from her."

"You spoke to her husband?"

"Yesterday. I don't get along too well with Peter Grimond. Few people do. He's a CPA and uses his apartment as an office, so he's home all day but gets very upset if he's interrupted. But last night I went up there to see Lenore or find out what had happened, and he said the strangest thing. He said that she had left him."

"Many women leave their husbands, Mrs. Ibsen."

"Not women our age, officer. Not that we don't consider it, but after being with one man for so long, there just isn't any place to go. We might make the man leave, get a divorce and settlement, but not walk out. And Lenore wasn't the type. She was quiet and patient, a plodder. When she got angry it was over something important, and she wasn't

the least bit flighty or emotional. She was everybody's friend."

"What do you think has happened to her, then?"

"I couldn't begin to guess. I know that there wasn't another man in her life, though I think Peter plays around a bit. But then that's to be expected of a man, I suppose."

Devlin wouldn't know about that. Rose had always been enough of a woman for him. "Did she leave any kind of word at her salon?"

"No, none. I called there this morning, and when I found out that she hadn't left any instructions for its management, I really began to get worried. That salon is very important to her, and I can't believe she would leave without some kind of plans for its continuation."

She shook her head. "I can't accept the idea that Lenore just up and left."

"I'll speak to her husband, Mrs. Ibsen," Devlin said. "Perhaps he's heard from her by now, and everything is all right"

Worth returned then, and Devlin thanked Mrs. Ibsen and left.

"The super's not the cooperative kind," Worth said as they walked down the hall to the elevator. "Practically had to drag him outside to see which apartment I meant. Then he called the owners before he'd part with a pass key."

"Who's the Tom?" Devlin asked.

"Young man named Osgood, in apartment seven-forty-seven. The funny thing is that the super swears

Osgood left for work this morning, said he saw him drive away in his sports car."

"Maybe he came home early," Devlin said, and they stepped out of the lobby into the brilliant sunlight. There was a crushed oyster shell path between the center court building where Mrs. Ibsen lived and the south tower where Osgood lived.

There were three other apartment houses to The Acreage, the others like south tower, at each corner of the property, ell-shaped, and ten floors high. The center court building was in the middle, also ten floors high, but square in shape. The ground floors of the buildings were open and paved for parking, with the lobbies at the end where the cars could drive in.

The Acreage was stone-wall enclosed, with only four entrances, one near each of the tower buildings, and the grounds were well gardened grass, shade trees, flower beds, paths and wooden slat benches. It was a complete world unto itself, and to Devlin, an alien one.

They waited a moment before the door to 747, listening. They couldn't hear anything inside the apartment, so Devlin unholstered his .38 Special and Worth slid the key into the lock. He jiggled the key until the tumblers fell silently, and then nodded. Devlin shouldered the door.

The blond-haired man at the window spun around in his chair, a pair of binoculars in his hands. "Wha—"

"Freeze," Devlin ordered. "Police."

The man froze, still in a half crouch. Devlin crossed to him and motioned for him to place his hands against the wall, then step back until his weight was fully on them. Then Devlin frisked him, pulling out the contents of his pockets as he went. The man was clean. Devlin let him stand and then show identification. He proved to be a Mr. Oscar Dortmund, 112B Yancy Street, married, five-eleven, 185 pounds, blond hair and blue eyes. He also proved to be a licensed private detective for Acme Investigators, Inc.

"What are you doing here," Devlin asked.

"Stake-out."

"Does Osgood know you're using his apartment?" Worth asked, lighting another cigarette.

"Of course," Dortmund said. "We're not stupid. We're paying him twenty bucks a day for its use, plus whatever food we eat."

"Who's we, Dortmund?"

"Me and my partner, Ed Bagley. He's asleep in the bedroom."

Worth roused Bagley, then started checking out Dortmund's story on the phone while Devlin continued questioning them. Bagley sat on the couch, his eyes half lidded and puffy, mostly yawning.

"Who were you staking out?" Devlin asked.

"Man across in the big building. Name of Grimond. Peter Grimond."

Devlin and Worth looked at each

other with surprise. Worth said, "Huhl!" and flicked his ash, and Devlin asked, "Why?"

"The usual," Dortmund replied. "Divorce evidence. We were hired by Mrs. Grimond for two weeks' surveillance. She was right about him; a big redhead's been visiting him most every afternoon. That is, until Saturday. Haven't seen her around lately."

Bagley yawned and added, "Haven't seen our client, either."

"What?" Devlin asked.

"Lucky thing we got paid in advance," Dortmund said. "We've been reporting to her twice weekly at her beauty shop, but when Ed went over there Tuesday, she wasn't there. And she hadn't been, not since Saturday from what we can gather. We decided that if she didn't appear by our next meeting, we'd notify you."

"Of course we saw her Sunday, when she was in the apartment," Bagley said. "She and Grimond had a fight along about seven in the evening and she stalked off to the bedroom. Pulled the curtains and we haven't seen her after that. Of course, the way we're situated, if the bedroom door or curtains are closed, we can't see the entrance, so we can't tell when she left."

"And Grimond?" Worth asked.

"Has been in the apartment ever since. He has a desk in the living room and he works there most of the day. Walks around a lot. On Monday, I think, he cleaned up the

apartment, vacuuming and everything, but he hasn't gone out and nobody's visited him. Except for one old lady Tuesday night, and she only stayed for a minute."

"I thought you couldn't see the entrance from here," Devlin said.

"Well, the curtains and door have been open most of the time," Bagley said. "Moreover, we can see the building's entrance from here, and Grimond's car stall is right next to the lobby. We've been watching that place like hawks, and I can swear that he hasn't left center court. He's been out of our sight maybe fifteen, twenty minutes at the most, except at night when he's been sleeping."

Devlin thought for a moment and then said, "There's one thing which puzzles me. You say that Grimond couldn't have left his apartment house at any time without you spotting him. Right?"

"I'll stake my rep on it," Dortmund said.

"Then how did Mrs. Grimond leave?"

Neither Dortmund or Bagley could answer that one. Devlin left them with a warning to stay further back from the windows, and then Worth and he returned to center court. They went directly to apartment 712.

Peter Grimond was irritated at the interruption.

"What is it?" he snapped when he opened the door. He glowered first at Worth and then at Devlin, then back at Worth. He was tall and

lanky, with thinning grey hair and sagging jowls. He was dressed in a white shirt and suit pants, but the pants were baggy and wrinkled and the shirt was coffeee-stained and almost as grey as his hair.

Devlin identified himself and Worth.

Grimond seemed to flinch at the mention of police, blinking rapidly as an owl does. He allowed them in, however, shutting the door and following them into the living room. The main difference which Devlin could see between Grimond's and Mrs. Ibsen's living rooms was in the choice of carpet color.

As Dortmund had noted, in one corner of the room was a paper-strewn desk, a pipe turned over in an ashtray on the floor beside it.

"We're here about your wife, Mr. Grimond."

"Lenore?" Grimond scowled. "Has something happened to her?"

"That's what we'd like to know," Devlin said. "A number of people are concerned for her."

"Oh." Grimond slumped in a chair and leaned forward, clasping his hands in front of him, a picture of morose despondency. "She left me, you see. After eighteen years, she left me. I thought when you mentioned her name she'd been in an accident, or something like that. I had no idea—"

"When did this happen?" Worth asked.

"We had a fight Sunday night. A spat over nothing, but it was the

straw, she said. The final straw. Out she went, bang, like that."

Devlin started walking around the apartment, not touching or opening anything, but not letting anything skip his attention. He saw that the apartment was getting a bachelor's patina; there was one shoe on the coffee table holding down a sock, dust on the credenza, magazines and cushions and books askew.

The sink was half full of dishes, and there was a large sack full of garbage in one corner. One bedroom had been turned into a combination office and storage room, though Devlin could understand why Grimond chose to work in the living room, where it was sunnier. The bedroom facing the yard was a mess. The bed was unmade and clothes were strewn on it and the floor. The dresser was littered with odds and ends, including a large brown alligator handbag with a black handle.

Devlin asked: "What did your wife take with her?"

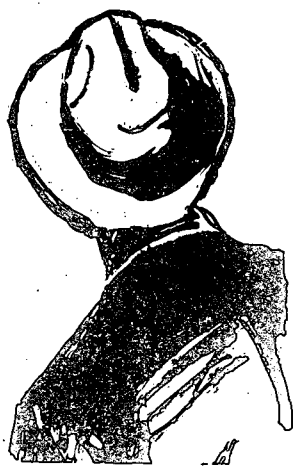
"Nothing," Grimond replied. "She left everything behind, saying she didn't want anything to remind her of me or her life here. She didn't take a suitcase or a toothbrush."

"Strange," Devlin said.

"Yes, it is, but that's what happened."

"And she didn't say where she was going?" Worth asked.

"No, only that I would be hear-



ing from a lawyer in a few days concerning the money."

"Money?" Devlin said.

"Settlement would be a better word."

"So you haven't seen or heard from your wife since Sunday," Devlin said. "You have no idea where she is, yet you didn't report her missing."

"She's not missing," Grimond protested.

"Then you know where she is?" Worth demanded.

"No, no. I mean she knows where she is. She just doesn't—"

"What was she wearing when she left?"

"A suit. A double-knit, with a belt and buttons up the front. A light blue. And a frilly white blouse underneath."

"Purse?" Devlin asked.

"Of course. Matching blue leather. Blue shoes, too."

"Do you have a picture of her?" Worth asked.

"What is this, officers? I am in the middle of a terrible domestic crisis, true, but I can't understand why you would be concerned. It is a private affair, I assure you, and —"

"A picture, Mr. Grimond," Worth repeated. "Please."

Grimond fumbled for his wallet, his fingers shaking badly. He had trouble removing a small snapshot from the milky plastic window.

"You act as though I did something to Lenore," he mumbled, handing the picture to Devlin, who was closer.

"We'll return this," Devlin said and studied the woman. It wasn't a good shot of her, accentuating Mrs. Grimond's slide from youth. She was in a one-piece bathing suit with some unknown hotel in the background.

It was a color snap, and showed the paleness of her skin, except for two strips of sunburn up her thin legs. Her hair was piled on top of her head like some Egyptian queen, and she was squinting at the sun and showing large buck teeth.

"And did you?" Devlin prodded as he handed the photo to his partner.

"Did I what?"

"Do something to your wife?"

Grimond grew very red in the face, and he sucked in his breath sharply.

"We were happily married. Or so

I thought, officer," he said stiffly. "I don't care for your insinuations. Please go."

Devlin shrugged. He had done about as much as he could without a search warrant or more evidence of some crime. At the door he handed Grimond one of his business cards with his name and the precinct phone number printed on it.

"When you hear from your wife," he said, "call us."

Grimond studied the card. "Why should I?"

"It would save us a trip back here," Devlin replied.

Grimond didn't respond. He shut the door firmly after them, firmly and loudly.

"Well?" Worth asked as once more they walked down the hall to the elevator. "What did you find while you were looking around?"

"Nothing." Devlin punched the elevator button. "Not one damned thing. And I don't see how he could have hidden her, either. There's only one linen closet and the clothes closets in the bedroom, and the cabinets are out unless he cut her up. Besides, if she was still there after three days, our noses ought to have led us straight to her."

"He could have frozen her," suggested Worth, and then he shook his head. "No, the refrigerator is too small. Perhaps the waste disposal in the sink?"

"Disposals have been tried. They won't take the bones and they burn

up. Only large commercial jobs can handle such a load."

"Those cartons in the bedroom. Maybe he shipped her out in one of those."

"Doubtful," Devlin said. "We should have seen the stack of papers and records he had to have taken from the carton, and on top of that, Dortmund would have spotted the truckers when they came to pick it up. And," Devlin added for good measure, "there would have been the problem of decomposition."

"Yeah," Worth said. He paused, smoking reflectively, then he said, "Maybe she's in the building somewhere."

Devlin thought hard about that as he rode down to the lobby. As the doors to the elevator slid back he said, "Let's find that super again."

The superintendent was in the basement, painting a piece of wrought iron. His name was Saunders, and he was bald, squat, with an ugly mouth and cold, suspicious eyes. He wiped his hands on a rag, and Devlin wondered if there was something in Saunders' past which, unlike the tenants, he hadn't been able to leave behind.

He took the pass key Worth returned and put it on the ring of keys hanging from his belt, and when Devlin asked him about Mrs. Grimond, he replied that he didn't know nothing.

"Didn't see her on Sunday or any other day. Got enough to do around

here without playing nursemaid."

"Are there any vacancies here? Any empty rooms?" Devlin asked.

"Nope. We have a two-year waiting list, in fact."

"What about closets?"

"There's a tenant storage room and a building supply closet on each floor of the buildings. Oh, and another storage room in the basements."

"We want to check them," Devlin said.

"Go ahead. Be my guest. Just don't ask me to come along. I've got a job to keep. There's stairs to sweep and the incinerators to clean, and—"

"Incinerators!"

"One in each building," Saunders said. "Got chutes which open on each floor, and the tenants throw their garbage down and it gets burned up. Wednesdays are my shoveling days."

Devlin turned to Worth. "Get Trimm on the phone and have him authorize a lab crew to be sent out here. I want those ashes sifted. Then you search the storage and supply rooms, and I'll start talking to the guards."

The security offices for The Acreage were on the second floor of the center court. The only person there when Devlin arrived was a young secretary who looked as though she had just finished her schooling. She told Devlin that each of the four gates were manned by a guard and that there was one roving guard on

duty at all times, and that there were three shifts a day. The fifteen men rotated positions and times according to a weekly schedule, which she supplied, along with a list of their names, addresses, and phone numbers. Devlin thanked her and left.

None of the five guards then on duty had seen Mrs. Grimond leave Sunday or since then, though they all knew her by sight. Part of their job was to recognize who were the tenants and who were visitors, and they all prided themselves in their ability. Devlin also asked about any delivery trucks stopping at center court, just to make sure that Worth's idea about the record-keeping cartons wasn't true. Again, none of the guards had seen anything which couldn't be accounted for as normal.

Devlin returned to the security offices and used the phone there to contact the remaining ten, off-duty, guards. He drew a complete blank.

At five o'clock, when Worth returned, Devlin and he had the lab crew gathered around the incinerator in the center court basement and pooled their information. Nobody had seen Mrs. Grimond leave center court or The Acreage either on foot, in a private car, or in a taxi. Nor had there been any trucks stopping beyond the ones which were expected and explainable.

Worth was dirty and dusty and empty-handed. The supply and the storage rooms had produced nothing and Worth was sure that he had

checked every other conceivable hiding place in the five buildings. The lab crew had collected three tin cans, some silverware, the metal backs to a set of buttons, and a bent shoehorn, but no teeth, bones, or residue.

"How sure are you that there wasn't a body burned in there?" Devlin asked the head of the crew.

"As sure as I can be without analyzing every ash," came the answer. "I'd think that if one had been burned, the smell would have been terrible. It's not a very good incinerator. It burns slowly and incompletely and really doesn't get all that hot."

Devlin thanked him and his men, told them they could go, and then Worth and he returned to the precinct house. Shortly afterwards Devlin went home thoroughly disgusted. He crabbed at his wife, snapped at his children, and tossed around the bed, bothered by the vanishing Mrs. Grimond.

Around midnight, his wife could stand no more. She switched on the bedside lamp and demanded an explanation for his behavior.

Devlin told her, concluding with, "And she's still in that building, Rose. I know it."

"But isn't there the chance that the guards and those private detectives overlooked her, and she did leave Mr. Grimond as he said she did?"

"The chance is very slim. Both the guards and the detectives are



trained, and if one missed her, I can't see the other missing her as well. Besides, no woman would walk out and leave everything she owned behind, including a thriving business."

He slid down further under the covers and folded his hands over his chest. "No sir, he did away with her for that redhead. I don't know what he did with her afterwards, but that's what happened."

"I certainly hope you find out before I have to do away with you," Rose Devlin said.

"I intend to," he muttered. "Now shut off the light so I can get some sleep."

The next morning Devlin and Worth began anew. They talked to the two private detectives again. This time Dortmund was asleep, and Bagley merely reiterated what had been said the previous day. He added that Dortmund had seen them in Grimond's apartment, but that nothing strange had happened since. Grimond had worked the balance

of the day, watched television, and gone to bed.

Bagley also said that they had been paid up until Friday, and Mrs. Grimond or no, they were going to finish their job and then leave.

There were five different guards on duty, though they all remembered Devlin's phone calls. Seeing the picture didn't change their memories any. That left five guards who hadn't seen the picture, and on an off chance, Devlin sent Worth in the squad car to personally interview the five, and then stop at the beauty shop and talk to the operators there.

Devlin located Saunders and again the superintendent was reticent and uncooperative.

"I tell you," he said to Devlin, "I ain't seen nothing, heard nothing or know nothing. Leave me be."

Devlin took the pass key again and went through the supply and storage rooms again. Worth was a good conscientious man, but there was always the chance . . .

Worth found Devlin just before one in the afternoon, on his hands and knees on the fourth floor of the east tower, looking at baggage tags. He was hot, grimy, and in a foul humor. Worth didn't help matters any.

"The guards are positive Mrs. Grimond didn't pass them, or that a truck picked up anything at center court. The girls at the salon all say they haven't seen or heard from her. Just to be on the safe side I checked

the logs at the cab companies, and neither Yellow or Checker has picked up a woman of her description within ten miles of here."

"Great," Devlin said sourly. "Just great." He sat down on a steamer trunk and rubbed the bridge of his nose, his eyes shut. He was developing a headache. "She isn't in center court. She isn't in any of the other buildings. She never left here, alive or dead, and the last person to see her was her husband, who hasn't moved from his apartment."

"What now, Hal?"

"Help me finish this building. It's the last one. Then we'll have lunch, and afterwards—" He paused, then said, "afterwards we're going to tear Grimond's apartment to shreds. It's the only spot left, and the last place she was seen."

"And if there's no sign of her?"

"Don't say that," Devlin replied grimly.

Grimond called his lawyer when Devlin served him the search warrant. The lawyer advised him that there was nothing he could do and to just sit tight and not say anything, even when queried. Grimond took his advice and sat at his desk and stared at Devlin and Worth as they went through his apartment.

One hour later they hadn't found anything. They compared notes in the hall so that Grimond couldn't hear them, then went back inside and started all over again. Two hours later they were still without anything.

"And don't come back," Grimond said, his only words the whole time, and slammed the door.

Devlin stormed down the hall, seething with frustration and smarting from Grimond's smug expression, contempt evident in his eyes.

When he got back to the station house, he sat at his desk and brooded, cupping his face in his hands. His wife called, telling him he was overdue for dinner and that she had fixed his favorite casserole and it was drying out in the oven, and even that failed to cheer him. He continued to sit, and then he began to talk to himself.

Worth wisely kept on typing reports and didn't interrupt. He knew that Devlin only talked to himself when absolutely furious.

So Devlin spoke unhindered about how he knew damned well that Grimond had murdered his wife following the argument Sunday night, and that Grimond knew he knew it, but that until the method of disposal was discovered, Grimond was safe.

He went over every detail, starting with his visit to Mrs. Ibsen's, the surprised detectives, and the sullen superintendent. He reviewed the search of the buildings and the incinerators and Grimond's own apartment. He hit upon everything he could think of, right down to his sitting in his chair, missing his wife's casserole. He sat and stewed, turning and twisting the facts, and it was painful, like pulling teeth.

All at once some minor things started to fit into place, and he knew he had the answer.

The grin on his face was more one of determination than elation. He swiveled around and said to Worth, "Get the lab on the phone. We're going back to see Grimond."

"What now?" Worth asked. "Why?"

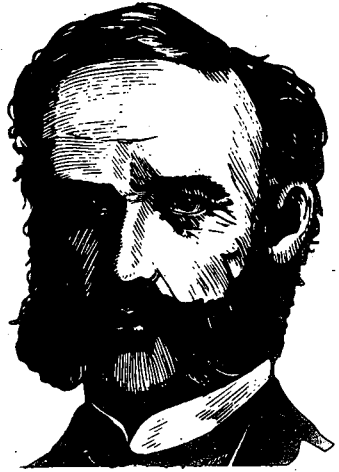
"I'll tell you on the way," Devlin said, and then turned back to call his wife. Rose was going to be mad, but he wasn't going to be home tonight.

The formal arrest of Peter Grimond didn't come until mid-morning of the next day, after a messenger brought Devlin the lab report. Devlin had been up all night, but as he read the typed report, he suddenly felt fresh and full of energy.

The report was, so to speak, his second wind. He handed it to Grimond, who had been sitting beside the desk for many hours, and asked, "Do you want to tell us about it?"

Grimond scanned the report and something seemed to escape from him. It was as if he deflated a little; his shoulders sagged, his head lowered, and he let out a tremendous sigh. His lawyer tried to caution him, but he waved him away and started to speak.

"We fought over Joanie, this girl I've been seeing. Lenore said she had proof, that there were detectives watching the apartment from south tower. She was going to di-



His dream has spread all over the World

The suffering Henri Dunant saw on the battlefields of Europe moved him not to tears but to action. In 1863, heeding his plea, 16 nations, along with welfare and learned societies, founded the first international organization for relief of war victims. Its symbol—a red cross.

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vorce me, and I couldn't stand that—my own business hasn't done too well, and hers was lucrative—she would have taken it and the apartment—everything," Grimond licked

dry lips and Worth brought him a cup of water from the cooler.

Grimond drank greedily and continued. "When she went into the bedroom and pulled the drapes, I saw a way of killing her. The detectives couldn't see me then, so I strangled her and stripped her and took her into the bathroom."

In spite of the detailed contents of the lab report, Grimond couldn't bring himself to mention his method of disposal. He coughed delicately and brushed over it by saying, "Afterwards, I stayed in the apartment, knowing that the private detectives would be my alibi. They would have to testify that I never left my apartment, had never done anything suspicious, had never been out of their sight for more than a few minutes at a —"

Devlin picked up the lab report and thumbed through it again, smiling. Grimond had been smart to turn his wife's trap around to serve his own purposes. But Devlin had thought it strange that Grimond hadn't gone out for three days, and he had wondered why, and then he recalled that at certain times the bathroom, bedrooms, and kitchen were out of sight to the detectives.

The death had to have occurred in those rooms, as well as the disposal, and Grimond couldn't afford to move from the apartment, not while there were two men ready to testify to his behavior.

The lab crew had found microscopic blood samples on one of the large kitchen knives and around and in the bathtub drain, evidence that Mrs. Grimond had been dismembered after having been killed. There was still some ash stuck to the fibrous bag of the vacuum cleaner and some along the edges and around the heating coils of the oven.

Devlin was a little chagrined at not having tumbled sooner to the significance of Ed Bagley's words, "*... on Monday, I think, he cleaned up the apartment, vacuuming and everything.*" Especially after he had seen the condition the apartment was in.

Grimond had used the vacuum cleaner on Monday, all right, but not to clean house. He'd sucked up the residue left in the oven, then reversed the machine and blown the contents out the window, to be scattered forever.

Devlin was going to have to thank his wife tonight. Maybe take her out to dinner. Her casserole was ruined, but she had inadvertently made him think of ovens, and then he had recalled Mrs. Ibsen's pie, and the fact that the ovens at The Acreage were all the self-cleaning kind. Self-cleaning ovens work by intense heat, burning the grease off the sides and bottom—quick, tremendous blasts of heat, getting up to 900 degrees.

That's much hotter than a crematorium.

ICE — AND SNOW

by

BILL

PRONZINI



**Set a thief to catch a thief? Not when
this fine pair of wise guys operate!**

BRANDYCE & SON, *Fine Jewelry*, was located on a narrow side street near San Francisco's Union Square. It had an unpretentious and unadorned facade, with a tastefully conservative window display and the name of the firm in punctilious black lettering on the frosted, pebble-glass door. Plush maroon velvet drapes were drawn closed at the rear of the display, assuring the clientele of the luxury of complete privacy.

It was a few minutes past two of a cold, wintry afternoon in late November when I opened the door and walked inside. A muted, silver-toned bell tolled softly overhead.

The floor was carpeted in thick shag, of a color matching the drapery, and the walls were of veined marble and ornate, inlaid mirrors. There were narrow, convex glass display cases set close to the walls on three sides, and off-center were several unostentatious marble sculp-

tures and a low, round table with modernistic chairs, containing hammered bronze ashtrays and several sedate magazines.

The lighting was strong and bright, making the jewelry in the cases sparkle with a sun-off-the-sea brilliance.

Two conservatively dressed men, one tall and elderly and distinguished, with silver hair and an austere manner, the other much younger and appearing to have an attitude of haughty obsequiousness, like a millionaire's butler, hovered unobtrusively in the background. A third man, heavy-shouldered, sat in one of the chairs ringing the round table, intently studying an opened magazine. There was no one else present.

I walked slowly along the nearest row of display cases, peering through my thick, steel-rimmed glasses at their contents. There were diamond brooches and diamond chokers and diamond rings; pearl earrings and platinum-and-gold bracelets; countless other items of precious stones and metals.

In the center case, neatly-printed cards had been placed beside three velvet-cushioned pieces, proudly identifying them as the famous and supposedly cursed Dalheim Blood Ruby; the equally famous Mannerling Necklace, of flawless blue-white diamonds; and the sapphire-and-emerald-studded Starling Brooch. There were no price tags in evidence.

I sighed and continued on to the

far display case, which contained men's and women's wrist, pocket and pendant watches. Fine and embellished timepieces, of Swiss manufacture and mostly containing twenty-five jewels: calendar and date and international time zone and zodiac and divers' watches; silver and gold and platinum and be-gemmed watches. Again, no price tags were visible.

I sighed once more, audibly, and moved to the small area of the case which held the cheaper, less ornate variety.

The least expensive ladies' watch, I judged, was a Rondine, one of which was at the rear of the top shelf, just at the open back of the case.

I was looking at that one when the youngish, haughty-appearing man approached me.

"May I be of assistance, sir?" he asked in a softly grave voice, as if he were an undertaker greeting a mourner rather than a jewelry clerk greeting a potential customer.

"No, I guess not," I said. I smiled wistfully at him. "I'm . . . just looking."

His nostrils flared ever so slightly, and his eyes seemed to move distastefully over my threadbare overcoat.

"Very well," he said, and turned on his heel, moving away.

As soon as his back was completely to me, I reached behind the display counter and plucked the ladies' Rondine off the glass shelf.

I clutched it tightly in my closed fist, and shoved the fist deep into the pocket of my overcoat. Then I turned and started for the front door.

I had taken three steps when a hand fell heavily on my shoulder, and a voice next to my ear said coldly, authoritatively, "That's far enough, mister."

I pivoted, blinking, my face blanching. It was the man who had been sitting at the round table, studying the magazine. His lean features were grim, jaw firmed, eyes chill and expressionless. The grip of his hand on my shoulder was inflexible, as if his fingers were appendages of steel.

"Who are you?" I managed.

"Security agent," he said.

My knees buckled slightly. "Oh my!"

The distinguished, silver-haired man came hurrying across the maroon shag at that moment.

"What seems to be the trouble, Costigan?" he demanded.

"Shoplifter, Mr. Brandyce. He just took one of the Rondine watches out of the display case there."

The distinguished man, who would be the senior Brandyce, scowled. "One of the Rondines?"

"Yes, sir."

"Our most inexpensive time-piece?"

"Yes, sir."

Brandyce fixed disbelieving ice-blue eyes on me. Beads of perspira-

tion laced my forehead, and I kept my eyes lowered. He drew his shoulders back, opening his mouth, but before he could say anything further the silver-toned bell sounded.

He glanced in the direction of the door, and then said in an undertone to Costigan, "We had best retire to my office. We don't want to conduct an interrogation in front of a possible client."

"Whatever you say, Mr. Brandyce," Costigan said.

His hand dropped to my elbow, and I was steered quickly but circumspectly to a velvet-draped archway behind one of the display cases. There was a short hallway beyond, which ended at an impressive door marked *Mr. Brandyce, Sr.* in gold leaf. Brandyce, who had preceded Costigan and me, opened the door and ushered us inside, closing it quietly behind him as he, too, entered.

The office was large, tastefully furnished, paneled in alternating squares of light and dark Philippine mahogany. There was a huge desk before windows draped in the same maroon velvet, and Brandyce went behind that and sat down in a high-backed executive's chair. Costigan guided me forward until I was standing in front of the desk, and then he released my elbow and stepped back a pace.

"Now then," Brandyce said. "The watch, young man."

I took it from my overcoat pocket and laid it quickly and gingerly on

the polished surface of the desk before him. It was heart-shaped, with small gold Roman numerals and a thin leather strap.

Brandyce looked at it somewhat disdainfully.

"A Rondine," he said. "Rather an undistinguished timepiece. Sixty dollars, retail. Why did you choose to take that when there were watches on display clearly marked at five hundred dollars and more?"

I took a handkerchief from my suit-coat pocket and mopped my roundly pinkish cheeks. My eyes were watering behind the steel-rimmed glasses. I blinked rapidly several times, opening my mouth and closing it again soundlessly.

"Well?" Brandyce said impatiently. "Out with it now. Why did you attempt to steal the Rondine?"

"My—my wife," I faltered in a thick voice. "For her birthday."

"Birthday?" Brandyce seemed incredulous.

I nodded miserably.

"You attempted to pilfer a sixty dollar Rondine for your wife for a birthday present?"

"Yes, sir."

"My God!"

"I—I lost my job, you see," I said. "Just two weeks ago, due to a departmental upheaval, and I haven't been able to find another. I am a high school English teacher, and it's very difficult to find a position these days, what with the colleges and universities graduating thousands of qualified instructors every

year. And my wife—well, she's been wanting a watch for the longest time.

"I was just walking by your establishment, rather aimlessly, feeling frustrated, you know, and something seemed to compel me to come inside." I took a deep breath. "I saw the watches on display and so I simply took the cheapest one, on impulse. I've never stolen anything in my life before today. But I had been thinking about Myrna, and how much she had been wanting a watch—"

Brandyce was staring at me as if I was a zoological specimen. "What's your name, young man?" he barked.

"Wyler, sir," I answered. "Kenneth Wyler."

"You still haven't told us why you chose the Rondine, Wyler. This is a very exclusive jewelry firm. You must have been aware of that the moment you entered. Why did you take the most inexpensive item we have in inventory?"

"Why, I suppose because if I had come home with a five hundred dollar watch or the like, Myrna would have known I had stolen it right away. Where would I get five hundred dollars, with us having less than two hundred dollars of our savings left? But if I brought her an inexpensive watch, then she might have concluded that I had somehow managed to get it for her on the installment plan."

I broke off, spreading my hands

in a helpless gesture, looking beseechingly at him.

Brandyce leaned back in his chair, the horizontal frown lines on his forehead deepening. He said to Costigan, "What do you think, Harold?"

"It sounds just lame enough to be the truth," Costigan said. "Why else would anybody lift something worth sixty dollars when he's surrounded on all sides by stuff worth a hundred, two hundred times that?"

"That is what I am paying you to tell me," Brandyce said.

"Well," Costigan told him, "I think he's probably leveling."

"Mmm, yes." Brandyce cleared his throat. "Give me your billfold, Wyler."

Obediently, I took my wallet from my suit coat and placed it on the surface of the desk beside the watch. He opened it, glanced with disrelish at the imitation leather, the single dollar bill in the currency section, and then looked at the drivers' license.

"Mmm," he said, and to Costigan, "Copy down his name and address, so we will have it on file for future reference."

I read meaning into his words. "You're not going to call the police, Mr. Brandyce?"

"I believe in giving a man a second chance, Wyler," Brandyce said. "You made a mistake today, but there's no need for your family to suffer for it—or you, either, providing you don't attempt anything



of a like nature again. Besides, Brandyce and Son can ill afford any publicity. We are an extremely discreet concern."

"I—I don't know what to say."

"Don't say anything," Brandyce said. "And above all, do not set foot inside my establishment again. If you do, I will instruct Costigan to summon the police to have you arrested immediately."

"No, sir," I said. Relief and remorse were plainly evident on my face. "I surely won't sir."

Costigan finished writing on a notebook he had produced, and handed back my wallet. I put it away.

"Show Mr. Wyler out," Brandyce said stiffly, and Costigan took my arm and steered me outside and through the shop—empty now save for the youngish, aloof clerk.

"Consider yourself damned lucky, Wyler," Costigan said at the door. "You could have tried this fool stunt in a place that wasn't owned by a

humanitarian like Mr. Brandyce."

"It will never, never happen again, Mr. Costigan. I've learned my lesson."

He nodded.

"Maybe things'll work out for you," he said. "There's always Christmas."

"Christmas?"

"To get that watch for your wife," Costigan said, and closed the door quietly in my face.

I walked away slowly, quickening my pace after a block, and went directly to the St. Martin Hotel on Pine Street. I rode the elevator up to the fourth floor, and used my key to open the door to room four-eleven.

Maurice was sitting in an easy chair at the foot of one of the twin beds, sipping an Old-Fashioned. His thin, average frame was encased in an immaculate gabardine suit, and there was a smile on his perfectly nondescript face. He saluted me with his glass as I closed the door.

I noticed, as I crossed the room toward him, that our bags were already packed.

"Ah!" I said, shrugging out of my overcoat. "Then you got it?"

"Of course, Simon," he said. He took the Mannering Necklace from an inside pocket and laid it carefully on the bed before him.

I watched the overhead light reflect brilliantly off the flawless, blue-white diamonds. "Did you have any difficulty?"

Maurice shook his head. "I made

the switch shortly after Brandyce and the security man hustled you off to the rear of the shop. That young clerk didn't look at me twice after I assured him I was merely browsing." He smiled. "The hand is always quicker than one pair of eyes, Simon."

"I've always had implicit faith in your abilities, Maurice."

"The imitation necklace is good enough so that they shouldn't be able to tell it from the real one until it's examined under a loupe."

"By which time we'll be in London," I said.

"Or Paris or Amsterdam," Maurice said. "You had no problem convincing them that you were a victim of whim and misfortune, I take it?"

"None at all. After I told them about my non-existent wife, and showed them the fabricated identification, they decided anyone with a face as ingenuous as mine must be both harmless and basically honest. They gave me a stern warning, and sent me on my way."

Maurice laughed.

"Everyone thinks international jewel thieves look like David Niven," he said, "and make their scores by climbing rose trellises to the third balcony of country mansions in the middle of the night—and opening concealed wall safes with sandpapered fingertips."

"I know," I said, and I caressed the cool, multi-faceted stones of the Mannering Necklace. "Ain't movies and literature grand, Maurice?"

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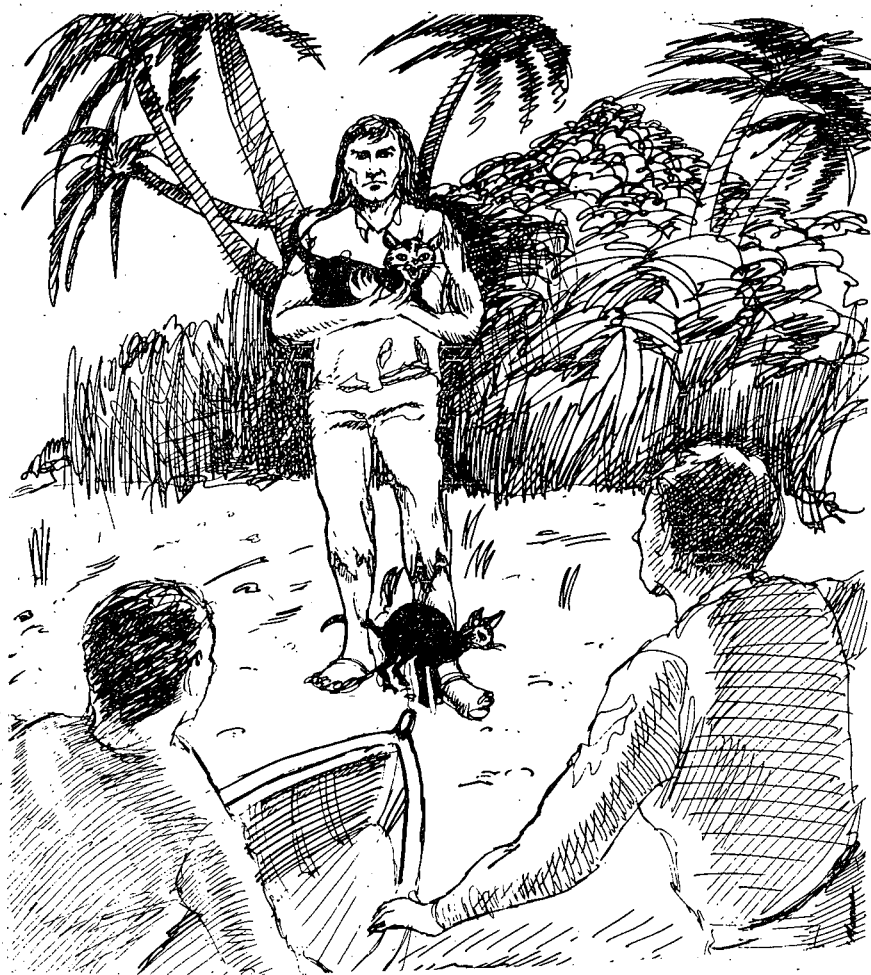
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MARCH—1971

THE CAT MAN

by REX BEACH



DEPARTMENT of LOST STORIES

In the early decades of this century no popular writer was more prolific or more widely read than Rex Beach. His stories, mostly of adventure and the outdoors, were universally lusty in character and such was his skill as a story teller that his tales read as well to today's audience as they did to another generation. It is a privilege to include "The Cat Man" in our Department of Lost Stories. From time to time in this magazine you will see this department. When you do, read with care and appreciation. You will be reading a story which, whatever its field, whatever its length, has been remembered as too good to be forgotten. Rex Beach and this splendid story belong in this select group. Read it. You'll remember it for an unusual reading experience.

THE EDITORS

HE LOVED CATS. Even on the night when he killed his sweetheart he delayed his get-away long enough to go home for his two pets—a black tom and a one-eyed tabby—for he could no more think of abandoning this pair than an adoring mother could think of leaving her children behind.

He was a hulking man, over six feet tall. His coarse red hair grew low on his forehead and far down the back of his neck, his eyes were round and pink-rimmed, his hands were enormous and the fingers were curved like claws.

His passion for cats had manifested itself at an early age. As a boy he had befriended every stray cat in his dingy neighborhood; he had stolen milk and food for them; he had hidden them away in little-used closets, and when his parents were asleep he had often crept out and transferred them to the warmth of his own bed.

Many a thrashing he had received for bringing them indoors. But whippings had not cured him and up to the day he left school to go to sea he had collected and cared for every homeless cat he encoun-

tered. So it had been ever since, and he was past forty now.

Strange that a person of his vicious habits should be capable of such an affection. Perhaps it was because he himself possessed marked feline characteristics. He was lazy, useless, and cruel; he was selfish and wholly incapable of gratitude; despite his bulk he moved with a silent ease and limberness. Moreover, his lambent green eyes were quick to glow with rage, and he could see in the dark.

A bully, a liar, a thief, and a murderer, this man. He made no human friends and yet the wildest alley cat fawned upon him and broke into purring at his touch.

Returning from the deserted pier where he and Marie had quarreled for the last time, he used his few remaining shillings to pay his landlady, called his cats, and then with them in the bosom of his jacket and his dunnage bag over his shoulder made his way back toward the docks.

Vessels were loading and unloading in the glare of lights, winches rattled, unbroken streams of hand trucks, each trundled by a sweating man, maintained a rubbing-like distant thunder and, in the stream, thickset tugboats with their sterns well down chugged and snorted busily.

Moving swiftly and silently and keeping mainly in the shadows, the man headed for a timber ship which he knew was pulling out that night short-handed. By daylight he was

well on his way to South America.

Marie had been good to this fellow. She had paid for his meals and his drinks; she had given him money in order to keep him ashore with her. She was the only woman who had ever really loved him and although he had never been able to bring himself to destroy a sick or crippled cat, and flew into a rage when people talked about drowning litters of unwelcome kittens, he nevertheless suffered no remorse at having killed her. He had a sailor's superstitions, to be sure, and he was sorry he had knocked her into the water—there was bad luck in that—but to the crime itself he gave scarcely a thought.

Drifting from ship to ship during the next few months, the fear of discovery left him. After all, he told himself, Marie had no relatives in Liverpool. She had come there as a refugee from Belgium and nobody at the laundry where she worked would feel called upon to raise a cry at her disappearance. People were forever disappearing. And at the worst, nobody could prove that he did it.

She had practically ceased to figure in his thoughts when, one night, he was awakened by a shouting from the bunk above him.

"For the love o' Pete," he heard a voice complain, "shut up about your damn Marie and leave us get a bit of rest!"

The man broke out in a cold sweat. Talking in his sleep! That

was odd, when he hadn't been dreaming. For a long while he lay awake nervously stroking his two pets with whom he shared his bed. Here was something new. This was dangerous.

On the following day, when nobody mentioned the incident, he felt somewhat easier.

But twice again on the run to Singapore the same thing happened, and a growing fear took possession of him. While the ship was docked at Singapore, something occurred that struck positive terror into him.

Following a night's heavy drinking in the red-light district, one of his shipmates told him that he had gabbed a lot about killing a woman. His informant, a rat-faced Frisco fellow, warned him to keep his mouth shut in future.

The big man blinked his pink-rimmed eyes and walked away without replying. He was shaken to the core. Blabbing now, with a bit of liquor aboard! If it kept up he'd feel a knot under his ear. And he didn't dare ask Frisco how much he had said in the pub, either. He decided it was the part of caution to jump the ship, so a few days later he and his two cats were on a vessel bound for Australia.

But Marie was more often in his mind now than previously. Slowly she had assumed a definite personality and he began to fear her. To keep from talking in his sleep he tried tying his jaws together as a

man does who wishes to break himself of snoring.

He went on another drunk in Sydney, and was swaying at the bar of a water-front hotel when he heard a shrill voice screaming into his ear something about "murder," "Marie!" The words partly cleared his addled brain, his fever cooled, and he found an angry woman with a bottle in her hand confronting him. She was the barmaid.

"Get out of here before I crack this over your lousy skull," she shrilled, brandishing her bottle. "Get the hell out! We don't serve no murderers in this place."

Through a fog he stared from the woman to his shipmates, and on their faces he beheld unfriendly expressions which alarmed him. Urged by the barmaid's vigorous arm and equally vigorous epithets, he lurched off through the low swing door to the street.

He was in a panic now; his heart thumped; his knees shook under him.

"I've done it this time," he muttered thickly. "I've let it out for sure."

Fright had pretty well sobered him by the time he got back to the ship, picked up his cats and his duffle bag, and boarded the Newcastle train.

As he was borne away, he decided that it had come to a pitched battle between him and his ex-mistress. Obviously she was impotent to harm him when he was himself, but she was amply able and

ever ready to pounce upon him when he fell off guard. She was a vindictive wench and bent upon vengeance.

Awake he was her master, but asleep or drunk they were on even terms and then their souls grappled.

Convict him out of his own mouth, would she? There was a dirty woman's trick. But he'd fool her. He'd strap his jaws together every night and he'd turn teetotal, damn her eyes!

Nothing less than a superstitious terror of the unseen, coupled with his natural cowardice, could have held the man to this purpose, for his vitals had been saturated with drink these many years and they demanded it. There were times when he thought he would go mad for a taste of rum. Repeatedly, while he tramped the streets of Newcastle looking for a ship, his feet led him to the doors of some drinking place, and inside him an insane craving ten thousand times more compelling than mere food-hunger or water-thirst cried out for satisfaction. He ached, his brain was afire, mind and body alike were consumed by yearnings almost impossible to subdue, but somehow he fought them down.

A BOAT LOADED with coal for the East Indies eventually signed him on, and as the grimy old tub wallowed northward he continued to fight that ceaseless battle with his appetites. Here was torture; this was punishment. Marie had shipped with him, as always, and she gloated over

his sufferings. He would never shake her off; never again would he be able to slake his thirst. Or if he did, she would, in all probability, lead him up the scaffold steps and spring the trap under him.

The Great Barrier Reef and Thursday Island had been left behind when thin streamers of smoke began to rise through the deck seams. It was a horrifying sight. Spontaneous combustion had taken place in one of the holds, and for two stormy days and nights, while the deck grew hotter and hotter underfoot, the collier crew fought the fire. Then suddenly the vessel listed, her decks bulged, and flames burst through with a roar. Amid shouts and confusion the order came to abandon ship, and hastily the small boats were provisioned.

The one in which the big man stood was run down from that belching inferno, but the sea tore it adrift and he found himself alone except for his cats. The waves hurried him away and to those aboard he was soon lost in the darkness. For a long while he could see figures flitting about against the glare, but the gale blew him on into the night and finally he could make out no more than a reddish glow upon the horizon, and this suddenly went black.

All that night the lifeboat tossed and tumbled. A terrific deluge broke finally and drenched its solitary occupant, but he bailed steadily and when morning brought a change in the weather and the sun came out

he dropped exhausted upon the gratings and fell asleep. For the first time in months he slept without tying his jaws together.

His dreams were untroubled and when he awoke to find a long, gentle swell upon the ocean and his two cats frisking over him, he experienced a feeling of relief akin to triumph. The lifeboat was seaworthy and it contained an ample store of food and water. What was more, something told him that he had shaken off his ghoul; that he was free.

Marie had always been afraid of fire. It was the one thing that provoked in her a swooning terror, for she had fled from Belgian flames and even the sight of a flaring match made her shudder.

The man laughed and shook his fist at the empty sky; profanely he voiced his relief. Then he fed himself and his cats, rigged up mast and sail to take advantage of the sou'west breeze, and spoke aloud to his pets.

"We'll head her north by the sun and stars. There's islands there and we'll raise 'em afore long."

Schools of fish made the surface of the water boil as they rose in panic from some hidden menace beneath them, long-winged sea birds uttered lonesome cries as they joined in the fray and in the wake of the slowly moving lifeboat the dorsal fin of a cruising shark occasionally appeared.

On the afternoon of the second day a speck appeared upon the hori-

zon which grew slowly, assumed outline' and became land.

"We'll make it by dark," he told his cats. "Wonder what the natives'll be like."

But the wind fell with the sun and it was nearly midnight before the boat grounded on the sand. Heaving the anchor overboard, the man picked up his pets and waded ashore. Dim shapes scuttled past him and disappeared into the sea and he said:

"Turtles! Dozens of 'em! That means fresh meat, whatever happens. Eggs, too."

He deemed it unwise to lie down and fall asleep in these unknown surroundings so he wandered about close to his anchored boat until dawn. Then he discovered that he was on a lovely little island. It was a tangled, fruitful place and, although many of the tropical trees were strange to him, he noted with satisfaction a considerable number of wild oranges, rambutans, bananas, mangoes, and the like.

One end of the island was stony and bare and this was a breeding place for sea birds. They were present in thousands and they showed no fear of him until his cats sprang upon a nest of newly hatched gulls. Then they rose screaming and circled close, beating the air with their wings and uttering apprehensive cries. The man laughed and stood by while his animals finished their breakfast.

Overlooking the rookery was a

bluff of volcanic rock, a hillock of slag pierced by a cave. He climbed up to it and peered inside, but it was a while before he could summon courage to explore its depths. Immediately he did so, a nauseating stench greeted him and the place awoke; the air grew thick with little fluttering bodies which streamed past him in clouds.

Bats! They brushed his face and neck and his flesh crept. They darkened the entrance, they hung from the roof in solid black masses. He swore at them and slashed them down with his stick. He loathed bats for they reminded him of Marie.

"Filthy, creepy little swine," he cried, covering his face finally and making for the open air. Standing outside the entrance he struck them down as they circled blindly. "Stinking vermin! I'd like to kill 'em all. They ain't like cats. There's nothing human about 'em."

A thorough exploration of the island, which occupied him until early afternoon, failed to discover any sign that it had ever been inhabited.

It was a tiny paradise perhaps two miles in extent and it struck him as strange indeed that natives from other islands had not appropriated it. Probably that was due to the fact that there was no fresh water.

Returning to his boat, he landed his stores, then rigged his sail upon four uprights so that it would catch rain water. Next he hacked down and trimmed a sapling to which he

lashed his shirt, and this flag he made fast in the top of an isolated coconut palm. Out of stakes and palm leaves he built a rough shelter and when darkness came he kindled a fire and toasted bacon and boiled a bucket of tea over it. He was extraordinarily well content with himself.

HE HAD BEEN on the island a little over a month when a big *prahu*, blown off its course, hove in sight. He waved his arms and yelled to it until the natives saw him and came within hailing distance, but his shouts, his wild gesticulations set them chattering and they sailed away without coming ashore.

Not until they had faded out of sight did he cease to roar curses after them.

"Well," he said, having by now developed the habit of thinking aloud, "there must be other islands near by. If I knew where I was at, and had a compass to go by, I could leave whenever I wanted to."

But the more he considered leaving his little domain, the more he dreaded doing so. Marie's restless shade was doubtless cruising the seas in search of him, and if she ever found him she would put him through that old familiar torture again. Here he was at peace. Better to be lonesome than to be hanged, he reflected. Perhaps she assumed he had been drowned. In any event, she could haunt this island and be damned to her. What if he did talk

in his sleep when there was nobody to hear him?

He wished he had a jug of rum and could go on a big drunk. A man needed a good drunk about once a month. But, for that matter, there were coconuts by the thousand, and a hot sun to ferment their juices. He'd manage to make out on that score.

And he decided to stay where fate had tossed him, and he would have taken down his shirt, now whipped by the wind to a frayed rag, only for two things. First, he was running short of flour and tobacco, and second, that cave in the bluff, he had discovered, contained a valuable deposit of guano. Guano, of course, was as good as gold. No, he was secure here and in a fair way to make himself independent.

A week later he made out a sail on the horizon and again he raced back and forth along the beach to gain attention. The sail grew larger and he finally saw that a small fore-and-aft schooner was bearing down upon him. It penetrated the reefs and dropped anchor, then a dinghy came ashore.

Two white men stepped out on the beach eying with surprise and speculation the ragged, hairy giant who awaited them with a purring house cat in his arms and another rubbing its arched back against his legs.

"Ahoy, there!" said the smaller of the two visitors. "How are you, stranger?"

"Not too bad," the castaway answered.

"Not too bad! You don't look none too damned good. How'd you get here?"

"It don't matter how I got here."

"Righto!" the other declared resentfully. "It's all one to me if you came on your yacht or swam down from Russia for the exercise."

The big man blinked his pink-rimmed eyes; the visitors stared at him silently for a moment. Then the last speaker resumed, "Now, look here, Robinson Crusoe. I'm Skipper Jarvis of that trading schooner—the *Flora*. Some natives came in Tenimber a few days back with a yarn about a white man on this island, and I've wasted forty-eight hours lookin' you up. I'm headed for the New Guinea coast. Get aboard and I'll drop you at Port Moresby."

"Thanks, Cap'n, but I'm goin' to settle here."

"Here?" Skipper Jarvis passed a hand over his beard and looked meaningly at his supercargo. It was plain he thought this fellow had suffered a touch of the sun. "In Gawd's name, what d'you want to settle here for? Were you thinkin' of layin' out a race track or maybe openin' a store?"

"No. I've found a tidy bit of guano and I had a mind to work it if I could get somebody to call in every so often and take it away. Come and look it over and I'll make a deal with you."

After a short discussion, Jarvis

and his companion followed the castaway along the beach to the bat cave and inspected it. When this was done the captain admitted, "It might pay to pick this up. Suppose I find you a partner to keep you company and some men to help you work it?"

"I don't want no company," the man asserted sullenly.

"Why, you'd go off your blinkin' rocker in no time, livin' alone in this Gawd-forsaken place," the super told him.

"Not me. I don't like people. I'll be all right."

They argued with him further, but he held his ground.

"Have it your way," the skipper agreed at last. "We've got to be gettin' on. I can put in here every sixty days for shipments. How's that?"

"Good."

"And I can put ashore what you'll need till my next trip—canned stuff, kerosene, candles, clothes, tools, and some empty sacks. I'll bring a bit of lumber for a proper shack if you can make out in the meantime. Anything else?"

"Tobacco. I want—"

"Oh, sure!"

"And I need a gun and some ca'tridges."

"Right. How about a drop of liquor?"

The man hesitated; he licked his lips and a greedy light flickered into his eyes, but he managed to refuse. He knew only too well that he would

be unable to resist it if it was at hand, and he dared not risk even one drink with strangers about.

The stores were landed as promptly as might be and debited against the man's first shipment, but when asked for his name he said harshly:

"What the hell! Call me anything." Whereupon Jarvis shrugged and entered him in the *Flora's* books as The Cat Man.

Before the schooner left, the man voiced one other request:

"I say, Cap'n, fetch me some more cats, will you?"

"Cats?"

"Cats is all I care for. Don't forget. Any kind at all, so long as they'll meow."

As the sun, resembling a huge red poker chip sank below the horizon the anchor chain squealed through the *Flora's* hawse pipe, her canvas fluttered, and she slid out between the reefs.

The man went about his work with a feeling of triumph: he laughed and he whistled and he talked to his cats. One of the first things he did was to scrape the ship's name from his lifeboat—it was well to completely cover up his tracks—then he made himself some so-called grog by fermenting a quantity of coconut juice and, when he deemed it fit to drink, he indulged himself in a spree.

It was a lusty one; he yelled and he capered in the sand; he staggered up to the gull rookery and flung rocks at the birds and destroyed

their nests. He cursed Marie, too, at the top of his voice. He invented jeering epithets to hurl at her.

He was sick for a day or so after his debauch, but he slept this off and then, much relieved in soul and in body, he began to dig his guano.

In due course the schooner returned with lumber and fresh supplies, but it was not in these that the hermit took his principal delight: he had eyes at first for nothing except the five new cats which it had brought. They were wild, half-starved creatures, picked up at native villages, but he stroked them, talked to them until they purred with pleasure.

Jarvis was disappointed at the amount of fertilizer he found sacked, for he had an eye to profits and investigation had proven that he had stumbled upon a good thing here, but when he suggested landing a couple of coolies to help with the work, the man gruffly refused. Jarvis pressed the point and the man flew into a rage.

"It's my island," he bellowed, "and I'll run it like I please. I won't have you nor your stinkin' coolies on it, understand? And you can tell anybody you see to keep off. I've got a gun and I'll use it. See?

This outburst both surprised and offended the skipper. For a moment he considered telling the man to go to blazes and refusing to call back, but he could not well afford to cut off what promised to be a

profitable trade, so he scratched his prominent Adam's apple, shrugged, and walked away.

The *Flora* came and went thereafter at regular intervals, and people as far as Port Moresby heard about The Cat Man. To them, and especially to the members of the schooners crew, he remained a mystery and a recurring topic of conversation.

Three years went by. Those cats had bred until the island was overrun with them and, doubtless because life there peculiarly suited them, they grew to an unusual size. Everywhere the man went they followed him. It was a strange sight to see him striding about surrounded by his pack, and although they fawned upon him and he could do anything with them, they were unfriendly to his visitors.

For a while they hunted their own food, wreaking such havoc with the birds that they finally migrated. Even the bats they destroyed. They monopolized the man's shack, they stole his food, unexpected litters of kittens were forever turning up and, when there was nothing left on the island for them to hunt, he was forced to find food for them.

Fortunately, this was no difficult task, for there were many turtles. During certain seasons these monsters came ashore at night in pairs and, while the females crept up beyond high-water mark to lay their eggs, the males remained near the water's edge on guard, ready at the approach of danger to signal a warn-

ing and scuttle back into the sea with inglorious haste.

By heaving these creatures over upon their backs and leaving them to paw helplessly until he was ready to chop them up, the man secured food for his four-footed friends. When he occasionally ran short of turtle meat, it was an easy matter to catch fish.

There was a large quantity of guano in that cave and Jarvis resented the slowness with which it was being dug. Several times he and the man had words about it, but there was nothing the skipper could do. He was afraid of the great hairy fellow and of his pets too. In truth, he had almost as good reason to distrust the one as the other, for one day a coolie trod on a sleeping cat and it turned on him and clung to his leg, clawing and biting until its owner pulled it off.

At night, as Jarvis and the supercargo sat on deck playing their phonograph and drinking whisky and sodas, they often discussed The Cat Man and his peculiarities.

"It ain't natural," the skipper would say. "You'd think any man would at least want a woman to make a bit of a fuss over him. But not him. And there's plenty of these dusky girls would jump at the chance to queen it on this island. As I figure it, he's in hiding."

But this was not the super's idea.

"There's more to it than that," he declared. "There may be a price on him, like you say, but I've an

idea he's found pearl shell in the shallow water and he's layin' away a fortune." The speaker was possessed of a romantic South Sea imagination and he had once done a little pearling. "That's why he's so scared we'll slip ashore and spy on him; that's why he won't use any help with his guano. He just digs enough to keep us coming. Mark my words, he'll pull out some day with maybe a million pounds on him and give us the laugh. There ain't any other explanation to it."

"Damn him! And after all we've done for him, too! If it wasn't for that gun of his and them cats, I'd find out, but—I'd sooner land at night among them New Guinea head-hunters than risk it here. Them squealing devils would tear a man to ribbons."

The supercargo nodded.

Feeling his old thirst coming on him, as it did periodically, The Cat Man one day brewed himself another batch of fermented poison, and when it was ready he made a beast of himself as usual. His spree lasted nearly a week and for several days thereafter he paid the penalty. But this time he did not succeed in sleeping off his nausea; on the contrary he grew sicker, if anything.

There came a morning when he could not stand on his feet. It enraged him to find himself in this condition for he had never known a day's serious illness. He forced himself to rise and gulp down first one then another of the scanty rem-

edies left behind by the supercargo. But they only made him vomit the more.

Coming out of a long sleep, it occurred to him that he had not fed his cats. He felt as badly as ever, but managed to get as far as the meat box outside and heave its offensive contents to the waiting animals.

By the next morning his fever had increased, but he felt less concern for himself than for his cats—he'd be all right in a day or so. Their hungry meowings distressed him, and his turtle meat was all gone. He crept out of bed and opened tins of bully beef and fish for them, feeling some alarm at the quantity required to go around. However, he couldn't let the poor things suffer.

He lost track of time then; he slept some, occasionally a delirium overcame him and he was back in Liverpool with Marie.

Once he summoned the strength to rise and hack open his remaining tins of meat and cast the contents to his cats. Then he fell back into bed.

How long his illness continued he did not know, but his rugged constitution triumphed finally. It threw off the effects of the poison he had imbibed, and one morning he awoke clear-headed.

The sun was shining brightly and yet, oddly enough, a tempest was raging. He listened for a while,

then he opened his swollen eyes wider.

That noise was not the wind, it was the snarling of his cats. He turned his head and saw that the cabin was full of them; they were coming and going through the open door, and they were thin, restless. A huge tom sat on a bench near his bed and stared at him fixedly, its tail twitching nervously.

"Poor old fellow," he said. He reached out his bare arm and stroked it. The animal licked his hand for a moment—then, without warning or provocation, it sunk its teeth and its steel-like claws into his flesh.

The man yelled and shook it off; with his fist he knocked it to the floor. The cat landed upon its feet and crouched, staring at him out of burning, yellow-green eyes that had suddenly grown ravenous. It licked its lips and growled; the nervous movement of its tail increased.

The man's hand and forearm were bleeding, but he felt too weak to rise and wash them so he lay where he was and stanchd the blood with his bedclothes.

"Damned ungrateful beast," he muttered. "I'll pay you off for this." He glared at the offender only to discover that every pair of eyes in the room was fixed upon him; the animals watched him with an eager, unblinking intensity. More cats slipped in through the door, and he noticed with a shock how thin and gaunt they had become.

Then a ghastly fear took slow

possession of him; he felt himself growing cold and faint. His pets! It must have been days since he had fed them and they had turned against him. They were sitting here waiting for him to die.

He yelled at them furiously and waved his blanket, but they shrank back only slightly and soon edged closer. From outside came a plaintive meowing and in the doorway appeared a huge female followed by a litter of complaining kittens.

The mother cat was a rack of bones, her teats were shrunken, but when she came to pause the kittens seized them avidly and she cuffed them aside. She, too, fixed a disconcerting stare upon the figure in the bunk.

With an effort The Cat Man raised himself and swung his bare legs over the edge of the bed. He'd have to drive them out of the shack while he was able, and close the door. He should have known better than to leave it open.

Ravenous devils! Waiting for him to croak! And that old tom—biting the hand that fed it!

It was the first time in all his life that a cat had turned upon him. Well, he'd get his stick and lay it on 'em, break their legs, give 'em something to squall about.

He lurched to his feet and seized the staff he sometimes used, then swung it viciously.

Bedlam broke loose. There was a spitting and a growling, a scuttling rush as the animals somersaulted

over each other to escape him. One of them screamed in agony and the man shouted: "Serves you bloody well right. Get out! *Scat*, damn you!"

In a wave they surged about the room ahead of him, 'snarling, squalling, fighting with each other. They were pets no longer.

Suddenly the man felt his knees buckle under him, then the floor rose up and stunned him . . . a trickle of blood ran from his injured hand and stained the floor.

The *Flora* came to anchor late one night under a low yellow moon, but not until dawn did Jarvis and his supercargo row ashore. As they left the schooner the skipper inquired:

"Say! Did you hear them devilish cats last night?"

"Rather! They kept me awake. How that bloke stands it I don't know. I'd go off my blinkin' nut."

"Sounded like they was eatin' each other up. Lord! It was enough to make a body's blood run cold . . . I say, where's the boss this mornin'?"

When the boat grounded and The Cat Man had not appeared, the captain uttered a loud halloo. He repeated his call without result, whereupon his companion cried excitedly:

"What did I tell you? He's pulled out with his treasure. Strike me pink, if he hasn't put it over on us, just like I said he would."

Together they made their way toward the cabin.

What's happened to all the cats?" Jarvis inquired as they drew near the house. "There don't seem to be half as many—"

Then he uttered an oath. "No wonder it sounded like they was eatin' each other up. That's just what they were doing."

"The dirty swine!" exclaimed the other man. "Leavin' them poor animals behind to starve. He'd ought to be arrested."

Again Jarvis called to the hermit; then, receiving no answer, he entered

the open cabin door. He halted so suddenly that the super collided with him. In horror they stared at what lay revealed.

The skipper backed out finally and closed the door, his face was the color of chalk.

"Gawd Almighty!" he said in a weak, shocked voice. "This is horrible."

The super, who was clinging sickly to a palm tree, nodded his head. "Ain't it? And—he loved cats."



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*Who had snuffed out the life of the
girl who knew too much, loved too well?
One of us alone knew the grim answer.*



INVOLVEMENT

by

CARROLL MAYERS

THE LIEUTENANT set us to checking the building as soon as the medical examiner released the girl's body to the morgue.

"Concentrate on this wing," he instructed. "Somebody may have seen something, recall some detail."

My partner, Phil Dowd, was skeptical as we left the parking area, headed inside the apartment complex.

"Nobody's come forward by now," Phil muttered. "Chances are nobody will."

"It's early. Half the building's not up yet."

"So what? People don't want to get involved these days."

"The lieutenant knows that. He still expects us to come up with something."

Phil assented. "Maybe the super can fill us in a little now."

The victim had been one Cora Fleming, a comely singer-dancer known to be a playgirl and featured at a local night spot. Hed body, head beaten and throat splotted with strangulation bruises, had been discovered in the tenants' parking area by a milkman, who'd roused the superintendent, a man named Holcombe. Holcombe, in turn, had called headquarters. His initial statement to the lieutenant had perforce been brief.

In the small basement apartment, Phil endeavored to put the super at ease.

"We know this is unpleasant for you, sir," he said, "but we'd like you to elaborate a bit on the girl, if you can."

Holcombe was a stocky individual, partly bald, with heavy jowls. His dark eyes reflected dual conflict: desire to cooperate with the police versus aversion to unfavorable publicity concerning his building.

"In what way, Sergeant?" he hedged.

"As you knew her here, her relationship with the other tenants," Phil said. "Specifically, the men."

"You mean, those she knew?"

"Let's put it the other way, Mr. Holcombe. The men who knew her."

The super still wasn't too happy.

"Miss Fleming was a mighty attractive girl," he countered. "I'd guess practically every man in the building must've noticed her at one time or another."

Phil said, "We appreciate that. But did any of them appear particularly attentive to the girl?"

Holcombe frowned. "Sergeant, I don't like to speculate on a thing like that."

"We're not asking you to accuse anyone," Phil explained. "We're asking for your own observation." He paused, added simply, "Murder is a nasty business."

"Yes. Well—" The super bit his lip, said finally, "If you're asking me for a name on that basis, I'll say Walter Cutler."

Phil Dowd got out his notebook. "This Cutler is married?"

"Yes. His wife's a semi-invalid."

"What suite?"

"Three-o-four. This wing."

"You feel he was especially observant of Miss Fleming?"

"The looks I've seen them exchange, it could've been mutual. Also—"

Holcombe broke off, still reluctant. After a moment, under Phil's steady gaze, he resumed: "One night last week I'd answered a complaint from a tenant on the sixth floor—that's Miss Fleming's floor, she had suite six-two-two. As I waited for

the elevator Mr. Cutler came around the corridor—”

The super broke off again. “He could’ve been visiting any suite on that floor,” he pointed out.

“Granted,” Phil conceded. “Anything more about Cutler? Or anyone else?”

“Well, no.”

Phil closed his notebook.

“Thank you, sir,” he said. “We’ll respect your confidence.”

Leaving the super’s quarters, we began a canvass of the building. Results were not encouraging, as in suite after suite the answers essentially were the same. They couldn’t help; they’d seen nothing, heard nothing untoward last night.

When we approached the Cutler apartment on the third floor, Phil Dowd paused before thumbing the buzzer.

“If he says anything at variance with what Holcombe told us, let it ride,” he counseled. “The lieutenant will tell us how he wants to play it.”

A lean, athletic character with dark good looks and wearing a natty gray suit answered our ring. “Yes?”

“Walter Cutler?” Phil asked.

“That’s right.”

Phil exhibited his ID card. “We’re police officers, Mr. Cutler. May we speak with you a moment?”

Cutler obviously was just finishing dressing. He gave the knot of his large maroon tie a final fingering, stepped back. “Of course.”

As we entered the tastefully fur-

nished apartment, Phil queried tentatively, “Mrs. Cutler—?”

“My wife isn’t up. She isn’t feeling well this morning,” Cutler said. His clean-cut features were quizzical. “What’s the problem, officers?”

“There’s been a killing, sir,” Phil said. “A strangling. A young woman named Cora Fleming. Her body was discovered an hour ago by a milkman crossing the tenants’ parking area.”

Cutler showed no overt emotion.

“Ugly,” he said. “I’m sorry to learn it. But why come here?”

Phil parried the question momentarily. “She had an apartment in the building. Did you know her, Mr. Cutler?”

Cutler said, “If you mean, did I recognize her on sight as a fellow tenant, yes. Other than that, no.”

“She was a party girl,” Phil amplified. “Men. The bright lights bit. Sang in a flashy night spot downtown.”

Cutler built a small smile. “I hope I don’t sound like a snob, but I’d hardly be on intimate terms with a girl like that.”

“But you or your wife may have heard something, seen something or somebody last night that didn’t appear significant at the time,” Phil said. “That’s why we’re checking the building, particularly this wing.”

As he talked, Phil Dowd moved across the living room, looked out a side window to the private parking area directly below.

Cutler became sober.

"I can't recall anything," he said. "And if Mrs. Cutler had, I'm sure she would have mentioned it."

Phil said, "The killer could have brought the girl home, gotten into an argument, choked her in a sudden rage. You heard no loud voices?"

"I'm afraid not. And my wife regularly takes a sleeping pill."

Phil didn't press, got out a card. "Thank you for your time. If either you or Mrs. Cutler think of anything—anything at all—we'd appreciate hearing from you."

"Of course." Cutler accepted the card. "Good morning, officers."

In the corridor, Phil halted. "What do you think?" he asked me.

"I don't know."

"You think he was up-tight?"

"Not particularly." I gave Dowd a close look. "You're suggesting maybe there was something to the super's intimation?"

"We know Cora Fleming was generous with her favors, involved with many different men," Phil said, "but, no, I'm not suggesting Cutler was one of them. Also, what Holcombe told us wasn't an intimation; it was just what he'd noticed."

"So where does that leave us?"

"That's up to the lieutenant," Phil said. "Let's wrap it up here, get on back."

An hour later, our survey completed with no significant information supplied by any tenant, we returned to headquarters. The lieutenant was interested in Superintendent Hol-

combe's remarks concerning Walter Cutler.

"We'll definitely check out the man," he said. "How old would you be is?"

"Middle forties," Phil said. "Fit. Good looking."

"It could be," the lieutenant said. "A vigorous man with an invalid wife could easily become involved with a sexy charmer living in the same building." He paused, added, "Not that we're hurting for a lead."

I said, "Sir?"

"We received a tip from an informer," the lieutenant said. "The past couple of weeks, Cora Fleming had been seeing Guy Locke."

Phil blinked. "Isn't he the hot-headed drummer who was up on a D and D a month ago?"

"The same," the lieutenant confirmed. "Plays in the band where the girl sang. I understand he has a jealous streak to go along with the temper. Also, he's disappeared."

I said, "You want us to try and locate him, sir?"

"I've already issued the order. Meanwhile, I want to tag all the bases. Dowd, hit all the popular spots. See if you can establish without question that Locke was with the girl any time last night. Massey," addressing me, "it's more tenuous with Cutler, but let's get started there too. Get Fontani to make you up a credible likeness. Show it around the more discreet spots. If Cutler had been squiring the girl any, I'd like confirmation before we



approach him with that information!"

Rocco Fontani, in R and I, was a deft craftsman with pen and brush. Guided by my description, he quickly sketched a recognizable drawing of Walter Cutler. So provided, I spent the rest of the morning touring the more exclusive, expensive evening spots; likely spots a man of Cutler's position would escort an innamorata for a secluded tete-a-tete.

I drew blanks everywhere. If Cutler had been seeing Cora Fleming on the sly, no barman or maitre d' tabbed him from my drawing. True, such professed non-recognition could have been a discreet service for a liberal tipper, but the fact still held.

Back at headquarters, Phil Dowd had not yet returned, but the lieutenant had another assignment for me.

"We could be almost home," he said. "Mrs. Cutler just called."

"Mrs. Cutler?"

"I know; I was surprised myself.

Seems the news media got wind of our pickup order on Guy Locke, and Mrs. Cutler heard it on the air. She feels she can identify Locke when we run him down."

"Mrs. Cutler witnessed the killing?"

The lieutenant nodded. "Apparently so," he said. "Why she's said nothing up to now, I don't know. She didn't amplify over the phone. Go see her and get her statement."

However odd the unexpected development, it was evident the lieutenant wanted no time lost in speculation.

"Yes, sir," I said and got started.

Grace Cutler was alone in the apartment. Admitting me, she came to the point without preamble.

"I—I'm sorry I didn't come forward when you were first here," she said; contrition lacing her tone. "I still haven't told my husband. But when I realized keeping silent was wrong—"

I studied her. Patently once at-

tractive, whatever chronic illness she suffered had prematurely aged the woman. Her auburn hair was lustreless, her figure thin.

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

"I—I saw it happen," she resumed. "I'd taken a sleeping pill but it had worn off. I was awake, restless. I heard voices in the parking lot; they weren't too loud, but they carried. I got up, looked out the living room window. There's a light across the street. I recognized that girl and a man, standing by a car, arguing. Suddenly, she slapped him and he grabbed her by the throat, choked her until she slumped to the ground. He bent over her for a moment, then whirled around, climbed into his car and drove off."

She stopped, tongued her lips. "I did know about that girl, the sort she was. I—I truly wasn't sorry. And I didn't want to become involved—"

I said, "I understand, Mrs. Cutler." Then I prodded, "The man; you got a good look at him? You'd recognize him again?"

"I believe so. I told the officer over the phone—"

"We'll ask you to make the identification as soon as we pick him up," I said.

She laced thin fingers. "I'll have to appear in court? I mean, I'm not well."

I said, "I'm sure your health will be considered, Mrs. Cutler."

She managed to fashion a small

smile. "Thank you. I hope your superior understands."

"I'm certain he does, ma'am," I told her.

Back at headquarters a second time, I learned the case was reaching a conclusion. Not only had Phil's inquiry proved fruitful to the extent Guy Locke had definitely been observed squiring Cora Fleming to several after-hours bottle clubs last night, but Locke himself had been apprehended as a fugitive at a private airfield south of the city.

"He admits being with the girl, but denies he killed her," the lieutenant told us. "He's edgy, though. When you throw Mrs. Cutler at him, he may break. I'll have him sent up again."

The interrogation room was cramped, plain. A table, three straight-back chairs. Guy Locke sat on the edge of one of the chairs. He was slim, blond, with several fresh scratches on his cheeks. His gray eyes concentrated on the table top.

Phil Dowd suggested easily, "Maybe you want to talk a little more now, tell us how it was?"

Locke's gaze didn't lift. "I told the lieutenant I didn't kill her."

"But you were with Cora Fleming last night?"

"That's right."

"Drinking."

"Yes."

"You finally drove her home, got into an argument—"

"I drove her home. There was no argument. Whoever killed her must

have attacked her after I drove away."

Phil rested one hip on the table. "Why not make it easier on yourself all around, Locke? We'll get the truth eventually. You know that."

"I didn't kill her."

"What about those scratches on your face? And why the private plane bit? Why were you running away?"

Locke still did not look up. "I wasn't running. It was something else. It had nothing to do with the girl."

"What something else?"

He didn't immediately answer; Phil waited another moment, then said quietly, "We've come up with a witness. A woman who saw you strangle Cora Fleming in the apartment parking area, can identify you."

Locke stiffened. He met Phil's flat gaze, nostrils flaring. "There's no witness. You're bluffing."

Phil shook his head. "We could be, but we're not."

"I didn't kill her, I tell you!"

"Our witness says otherwise. She'll say it in court."

Locke continued to glare at Phil; abruptly, his shoulders sagged.

"All right," he muttered. "Whether you're bluffing or not. I'm tired."

Phil soberly phrased the clincher. "You did kill her? Understand, we've got to cite you your rights—"

Locke's expression was bleak. "I don't care about that. Yes, it was like you said, an argument. I wanted

Cora to lay off other men, but she was a teaser. We'd been drinking, had words when I drove her home. She slapped me, clawed at me, and I lost my head, grabbed her throat."

He stopped, inhaled. "Afterward I panicked, tried to get clear, get out of the country—"

Phil glanced at me. "Get a stenographer in here. And tell the lieutenant."

A half hour later the lieutenant sent us back to the apartment complex to ascertain if Grace Cutler felt physically up to coming to headquarters to make her initial identification of Locke. The case broken, it suddenly struck me that Phil was silently reflective. I slowed the squad car. "Something?"

"Eh?"

"What's with the big think?"

He shook his head. "Just considering this whole bit." Then he touched my arm. "Drive by the morgue."

"Huh?"

"I want to see the M.E. a minute."

"What about?"

"I'm not sure. Just stop by."

Plainly, he didn't care to expound at the moment. I shrugged, changed course. Phil was inside the morgue only briefly, made no specific comment when he came back to the car. Five minutes more saw us at the Cutler apartment.

Walter Cutler had returned; his look was uncertain as he admitted us.

"My wife has just informed me

what she saw, what she finally told you," he said to me. "I'm sure you appreciate she meant no true obstruction. It was simply a matter of not wishing to become involved, especially in view of her overall condition."

Phil glanced at Grace Cutler standing behind her husband.

"We understand," he said. "We've been instructed to ask Mrs. Cutler to come to headquarters to make positive identification; although now that we're here perhaps that won't be necessary."

Cutler said, "I'm afraid I don't follow you."

Phil studied the man. "Yes, you do, Mr. Cutler. Because it wasn't Guy Locke who strangled that girl. It was you."

The hushed intake of Grace Cutler's breath was overridden by her husband's quiet denial. "That's ridiculous, Sergeant."

Phil Dowd shook his head. "I don't know whether your wife awoke last night to actually witness what you did, or whether she merely suspected it from how you may have acted this morning. Whatever, once she heard on the air about the imminent arrest of a prime suspect, she decided to fuel that fire by making the statement she did. Later, to still shield you, she would definitely 'identify' Locke as the killer."

Cutler's gaze flicked to his wife, back to Phil. "You can't be serious."

"But I am," Phil rejoined. "It was you, not your wife, who happened



to be out of bed when Locke brought Cora Fleming home. You overheard them arguing, saw Locke choke her after she slapped him."

"No."

"But Locke didn't kill her, Cutler. After she'd slumped to the ground and Locke fled in his car, you saw her move, partially recover. That's when you had your inspiration. You were involved with Cora Fleming. Perhaps you were tiring of her; perhaps she was getting money from you, threatening to go to your wife."

"In any event, you dressed and then you went down to the parking lot and kicked the girl in the head until she truly was dead. We've just verified with the medical examiner that those head wounds were the actual cause of death."

My scalp prickled as I envisioned the scene: Cutler lashing out at the

semi-conscious girl, gambling his macabre ploy would remain undetected, would solve his problem, and confident that Guy Locke, even then in flight, would believe he had killed Cora Fleming.

Walter Cutler was staggered by Phil's damning summation. His dark features flushed and he had trouble breathing.

"No!" he whispered. "I was attracted to her, yes. I'd been seeing her. But I didn't kill her! I swear—"

An agonized whimper cut him short. My gaze jerked to Grace Cutler and my flesh crawled. Because it was then that I recognized the whole truth. All the opportunity and action Phil had ascribed to Walter Cutler rightly belonged to his wife. It was Grace Cutler, a woman failing in

health and looks and sickeningly aware of her husband's infidelity, who had, unknown to that husband, impulsively taken that irrevocable step to preserve her marriage.

And once that step had been taken, Grace Cutler had used the developing facets as she'd deemed best, until the man for whom she had killed to hold onto had been accused of her crime and she could no longer continue.

Phil Dowd, too, abruptly understood. His jawline bunched and a somber light crept slowly into his gaze.

"I'm sorry," he said tightly, and for a long moment there were no sounds in the room except Walter Cutler's labored breathing and his wife's soft sobs.

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DAWN CATCH

Somewhere out there, a ship was waiting for us. And somewhere out there Death was waiting too. So I did the only thing left to me . . .

by

M. G. OGAN



WE WERE scouting for Yellowtail that morning, out in the channel beyond Santa Catalina Island, close to Osborn Bank. The Pacific was calm, with a few oily swells, and thick patches of fog clinging to the water.

Paul Henderson skips the *Blue Marlin*, and he was up on the flying bridge of the forty-foot cabin cruiser. Paul, my uncle, is twenty-nine, and he bought the boat two years ago when he mustered out of the Navy. I helped him convert

it to a sportfisher for charter parties, and we're partners in the *Blue Marlin*.

We were alone on the boat that morning. I was in the cockpit, under the bridge, tending the Lycoming engines and reading the fathometer.

It was half an hour until dawn. We'd just come out of one fog patch, crawling at six knots, and were heading for another one a hundred yards dead ahead.

"How many fathoms now, Mickey?" Paul called down.

We wanted to lay right over Osborn Bank before we headed back to San Pedro, and float there until the fog patches burned off.

"A hundred and nine fathoms is my reading now," I called up to him.

Osborn is only nineteen fathoms. It was early for Yellowtail tuna, but if any schools were this far north, they'd be lurking around Osborn.

"It's shallowing," Paul said. We'll hold this bearing another ten minutes."

When we found Osborn and it cleared, we planned to take a visual bearing on San Nicolas, west of us, and the tip of Santa Catalina, behind us. That way we could come right to it tomorrow morning when Mr. Giddings and his party came aboard.

Mr. Giddings is president of Aero Industries, and our best charter client.

"Seventy-five fathoms, Paul . . . now seventy . . ." The bottom was

rising fast "Sixty-eight fathoms . . ."

The *Blue Marlin* glided into the fog bank ahead. I heard water slapping off to starboard, and then from almost on top of us the ship's whistle blasted.

"Look out! To starboard, Paul!"

He'd seen the sharp, black bow cleaving down on us before I did, because the engines surged full speed ahead, and the stern of the *Blue Marlin* settled so fast it knocked me off balance.

I went staggering back along the cockpit, finally grabbing a stanchion. I stood braced, then, and watched the black side of the ship slither past our transom, barely ten yards away.

The stern passed, with the screw churning foam. I read the ship's name, *The Athene*, and saw the Greek flag hanging limply.

I also saw what looked as if it was a white, square package scaled off the aft deck to splash down in the ship's churning wake. Some seaman, standing back there, must have thrown it.

"You all right, kid?" Paul had left the wheel to scramble down the cockpit ladder. He'd cut the engines, first, so we were drifting. "That was too close!"

The white package was bobbing in the water.

"What's that?" I said, pointing. Paul stared, with a puzzled frown. "Where did it come from?"

"Someone threw it off the rear deck of that Greek freighter."

"Are you sure, Mickey?"

"Of course I'm sure! Let's get it."

Paul nodded. "Okay. Get forward with a boathook." Then he laughed nervously. "It's probably the cook's baggage."

The freighter blasted again, now off our port bow, and deep in a fog patch.

"Do you think they saw us?" I asked.

Paul shook his head. "I doubt it. We were too close under him."

I got up into the bows, with a boathook. Paul climbed back to the flying bridge, and nudged the *Blue Marlin* to the floating package. I hung out as far as I could, jabbing with the boathook. The bow dipped, and I'd caught it.

When I pulled it aboard, I was holding something very heavy for its size, securely wrapped in thick, white plastic. It had been tossed overside swathed in a loose, transparent plastic sack.

There were small holes punched in the sack, so I had scooped it up just before it sank.

"What have you got?"

"I don't know." I took it to Paul on the bridge.

Paul let me take the helm while he hefted the package in his hands.

"What do you suppose it is, Paul?" It was my turn to laugh nervously. "Narcotics, maybe?"

"No." Paul bit his lip. "If I didn't know that it couldn't be—"

The sun was up, and the fog patches were lifting. Off to our port-

side, about a quarter of a mile away, another cabin cruiser was bobbing in the swells.

"Take this below, and then stay there." Paul shoved the package in my hands. "Don't fool with it, Mickey, and that's an order!"

He had the *Blue Marlin* full speed ahead, and in a tight starboard turn, before I was down the ladder and in the cockpit.

Water pounded the hull as Paul headed in, and it was getting choppy with the morning breeze coming up, but he kept those throttles notched full ahead. I stayed in the cabin, as he'd told me to, but I could see astern from the companionway.

The other cruiser started up, and came after us, but only for a short distance. It heeled off, then, and laid a course up the coast, toward Santa Barbara.

I got the binoculars, but I couldn't make out the name on its stern, if there was any there. I did study the silhouette, so I'd know the boat again, maybe.

The radio mast was more sharply raked than it should have been.

When we were finally inside the San Pedro Channel, between Santa Catalina and the mainland, I went back to join Paul on the flying bridge.

Paul had the *Blue Marlin* throttled down to cruising speed now. "How old are you, Mickey?"

"That's a silly question! You know that I'm seventeen."

Paul grinned. When he does that,

his eyes crinkle up. "Seventeen is old enough."

"Old enough, for what?"

"To keep your mouth shut tight," he said, and he wasn't grinning now. "When we get ashore, even you and I don't talk about this, do you understand?"

"All right, but when are we going to dig into that package, and find out what it is?"

"We're not going to," Paul said, "so now shut up."

Paul and I bunk together aboard the *Blue Marlin*. We have a berth at Pierpoint Landing for the boat, but Paul didn't lay in there. Instead, we let the anchor go out in the harbor. Paul loaded our package into the dinghy and got ready to row ashore.

"Stay aboard, Mickey," he ordered me. "This may take some time, but don't sweat it, do you understand?"

"What are you going to do, Paul?"

He pushed the dinghy away from the *Blue Marlin* without answering.

I went down to the galley and fixed myself some breakfast. After that, I sprawled in my bunk and tried to read a book. It wasn't much use.

The more I thought about it, the more sure I was that narcotics had been in that package. It was the only explanation that made any sense to me.

What did Paul intend to do about it? He had a glass on the flying

bridge that was much stronger than the binoculars in the cabin. I had a hunch that he'd been able to make out the name of that other cruiser.

We were hard up for money, and I knew that, too. That was one of the reasons we'd been so anxious to see that Mr. Giddings and his party hit into a school of Yellowtail.

I had it all figured out in my little two by four mind that morning. Paul was ashore, making a deal with the smugglers who were supposed to pick up the dope.

The more I thought about it, the sicker I got, and I couldn't think about anything else that morning.

It was noon, and I was making a sandwich in the galley, when the *Blue Marlin* was hailed. I went up on deck.

Johnny Frost, who skippers the *Poseidon* from Pierpoint, was hailing. He was taking out an afternoon party.

"Where's Paul?" he called.

"Ashore."

"Couple of fellows came by this morning, looking for your boat."

My heart did a flip, and then sank. "Who were they?"

Johnny shrugged that he didn't know. "Tell Paul, will you?"

"Okay."

Now I had it all figured out. Narcotics agents were wise, and already looking for us.

Paul rowed out in the dinghy at two o'clock that afternoon.

"What took so long?" I asked. He didn't have the package with

him. "What did you do with it, Paul?"

He gave me a good natured grin, but said, "Stow it, Mickey. Get on the anchor detail. We're moving."

When the *Blue Marlin* was berthed, I told Paul about the two men Johnny Frost had mentioned. Then I embroidered it a little. "Johnny said that they looked as if they might be detectives."

I'd boiled coffee. Paul had poured his, and was about to take a sip. Now he set his cup down on the galley table. "I've a good hunch what you have in the back of your mind, Mickey." He was so serious that I couldn't meet his eyes. "Do you think that I've sold out to someone?"

"I wouldn't know, would I?" It wasn't a good thing to say to Paul, but I was shaken up, that day. "I don't think so," I added. "Have you?"

Suddenly he was a different guy. Paul mustered out to take care of me, when my folks died after an auto wreck three years ago. We'd been closer to each other than some brothers are, but now we weren't.

"I've talked with the men you say Johnny thought were detectives," he said. Now he didn't look at me. "They aren't detectives, by the way. They've chartered the *Blue Marlin* for a week from today."

"Why?"

Instead of answering, Paul drank his coffee.



"What did you do with the package?" I asked him then.

"The package?" He gave me an absent-minded stare. "Oh, it's in a safe enough place."

I stopped asking questions.

The next morning, Paul took the Giddings party out to San Clemente, instead of over the Osborn Bank. We didn't find Yellowtail, but Mr. Giddings hooked up with a hundred and fifty pound shark. He wouldn't let me cut him loose.

"Stand back, Mickey," he said, "and let's see what kind of fight this fellow puts up. I'm used to doing battle with the human variety, so maybe I can handle this baby."

He couldn't, of course, but it took him two hours to find that out. By the time it broke his line, he decided he'd had all the fishing he wanted for one day. His guests were from back east. They landed barracuda, and considered it a good day's fishing.

Going in, I asked Paul about not

trying to find Osborn Bank for Mr. Giddings.

"I didn't have it in mind," was all that he'd tell me.

I was a mixed up kid that next week. Paul was acting funny. He went out nearly every night and stayed late, but he never mentioned to me where he was going.

I didn't ask him. I stayed aboard the *Blue Marlin*, doing a lot of thinking. It was toward the end of the week before I made up my mind.

I decided that whatever Paul was mixed up in, I was in it with him, all the way. The night before our two mystery charter passengers were to come aboard, I tried to tell him how things stood.

"Everyone has to cut a corner, once in awhile, I guess," was the way I tried to bring it up. "I'm old enough to understand that, Paul."

We were in the galley eating supper. He glanced up at me from his plate. "What are you talking about?"

"You're the skipper aboard the *Blue Marlin*."

"Yes, I am, Mickey." He laid down his knife and fork. "There's only so much I can tell you about what we're doing tomorrow."

"I understand. The less I know, the better off I'll be?"

"That's about it." Paul frowned, and didn't say anything for a minute.

"I want you below as soon as we're outside the harbor breakwater," he said then. "You can han-

dle the radio just fine, so I want it tuned to the emergency band."

"All right. If I hear anyone after us, I'll let you know."

"Let me know *nothing*," Paul said, "and that's an order! Keep the set turned off until I say, 'Bring up three cups of *fresh* coffee.' Do you have that?"

I repeated the phrase, but missed the word "fresh." Paul called me. He told me that "fresh" was the key word. "If I order coffee, without using it, bring coffee, Mickey," he said, "but when I call for fresh coffee, snap on the transmitter to send just one word."

"What's the word?"

"*Rabble*."

Paul didn't finish his supper that night, and neither did I. The two men were coming aboard at four o'clock the next morning. The *Blue Marlin* was shipshape, so we had nothing to do but be nervous.

The next morning, Paul didn't introduce me to our passengers, but I didn't mind because they weren't the kind of men you like to meet. One was a sailor of some kind—at least, he knew how to handle himself aboard—but the short, stubby man was strictly a landlubber.

The sailor scowled and talked in a hoarse voice. The landlubber was the prissy type. He thought that the *Blue Marlin* smelled too much of fish.

I stayed below, as Paul had told me to do, but I could hear whatever was said on deck through the ven-

ilator. Before we cleared the breakwater, the landlubber was sick over the side, which tickled me.

The sailor also thought it was funny.

"I'm not going to regret it when we can split up," I heard the sick one tell the sailor.

There wasn't any more conversation after that until we'd cruised past the west end of Santa Catalina. Then the sailor began to give Paul bearings. We were on course for Osborn Bank, and the sailor knew exactly where to find it.

I watched the fathometer and stayed close to the radio. When the reading was exactly nineteen fathoms, Paul cut the engines and we drifted.

There were no patches of fog this morning. It was just before dawn and getting light. The morning was going to be clear and bright.

"How long did it take that package to sink?" I heard the landlubber ask Paul.

"Just a few minutes."

"I see. Well, we'll have exactly ten minutes to make the pickup this time."

"We can make it," Paul assured him.

Now I knew that Paul had lied to them about that other package. Somehow that made me feel better, although I was still convinced this was a narcotics deal of some kind.

A commercial trawler was drifting about a mile away from us, on



the starboard bow, and Paul mentioned it.

"They won't notice anything," the landlubber told him.

I looked again, and the trawler wasn't trawling. Nets hung limply from its booms.

A man on the bridge was watching us with binoculars!

A rusty tramp steamer was coming up toward us from the south. She was on a course that would lay her only a hundred yards off our bow, when she passed. She flew the Panama flag, which doesn't mean anything, as far as nationality is concerned. She showed no name on her bows.

I'd lost sight of her, from the cabin, when the drop was made, but I heard the sailor call out, "There it is!" Then he growled at

Paul, "Half speed ahead, and don't get smart."

"With a gun in my ribs?" Paul said. "I've been stupid to think that trawler wouldn't be standing by to take you fellows off my boat, but I'm not crazy."

"Got it!" I heard the sailor call, within a minute. Then he said to his partner, "Let's not forget the kid."

The trawler was coming toward us, with a bone in her teeth.

"Forget him." Paul's voice was tight. "He's making coffee. Mickey?" he called down the speaking tube.

"Yes, Paul?"

"Three cups of fresh coffee, in a hurry."

"Coming right up." Before I'd finished saying it, I had the transmitter turned on. "Rabble."

The trawler was coming alongside.

"Rabble," I said again. "*Rabble!*"

Before I could switch over and find out if anyone had read me, the gun exploded from the companion-way.

The noise staggered me. The bullet smashed the radio. I hit the deck before the landlubber could pull the trigger again, but I didn't have to. Paul had tackled him from behind.

The gun flew out of his hand, skidding across the deck toward me. I snatched it up. The landlubber had whacked his head, going down, so he was out cold.

Paul came scrambling toward me on his hands and knees. "Careful

with that thing, Mickey. "It might go off."

The pistol didn't, because I laid it down on the radio table, very carefully. A gun did go off, close.

"What's that?" I asked Paul. I was afraid the trawler was shooting at us.

Paul and I scrambled up to the bridge. He grabbed the pistol, but we didn't need it.

A U.S. Navy submarine had surfaced just beyond the trawler. Its gun crew had laid a shot across her bow. The four men in the trawler crew had their hands up high.

So did the sailor, still up in the bow of the *Blue Marlin*, with the package tossed off the tramp steamer on the deck at his feet.

A Coast Guard 'copter was swinging toward us from the direction of Santa Catalina. A rubber boat was coming over from the sub. A formation of three U.S. Marine Corps jets buzzed the scene, climbed, turned, and buzzed us again.

When it was quiet enough, I asked Paul, "Are we in trouble?"

He grinned, and shook his head. "Not any longer."

The sailor and the landlubber were hustled aboard the sub's rubber boat, while a lieutenant from the sub gathered up the package, snapped Paul a quick salute, and then went over the side into the rubber boat with it.

A petty officer aboard the 'copter got on a bull horn and told the men

aboard the trawler that a cutter was on its way to take them into custody.

Paul started the *Blue Marlin's* engines, and we headed in. I stayed on the flying bridge with him.

"Maybe you can tell me now what was in that package, and the other one, too?"

Paul's eyes narrowed. He glanced at the compass card, and altered course a point. "A transport is sailing, day after tomorrow, from San Diego for the Far East," he said

finally. "Six thousand troops will be aboard."

"How do you know that?"

"There's a certain type of mine," he went on, "that lays in a channel until a ship comes along with a homing device aboard it. Then, blooey!"

"That's what was in those packages?"

Paul nodded. "The homing device, ready to go aboard the *S. S. Dexter* as a box of candy."



Next Month

Another DEPARTMENT OF LOST STORIES Masterpiece

THE FABULOUS LAUNDRYMAN

by BEN HECHT

Next month we proudly present a true treat for crime fiction fans everywhere. Ben Hecht, famous writer of "The Front Page" and many other stage successes, has always been acclaimed one of the best short story writers of our time. It is a privilege indeed to present next month one of his finest, "The Mystery of the Fabulous Laundryman," a suspense-packed melodrama of life and sudden death. It's like nothing you've ever read, yet, as Hecht says, it's "A story that might be true." Don't miss this one!

When you dance to the
Devil's music — be sure
you can pay the piper!

THE POISON MAN

by
EDWARD
D.
HOCH



DAVID SHARDER paused for a moment at the top of the path, studying the afternoon strollers along the edge of the pond. His eyes passed quickly over the young couple on the park bench, and the boys wrestling on the grass, and even the blonde girl in shorts dangling her feet in the water. He was looking for one person. A man he'd never met.

Then, suddenly deciding, he started down the path toward a man in a black overcoat somewhat removed from the rest. He sat alone on one of the green park benches. Though the day was balmy he kept the coat bundled around him. As Sharder approached, he took a few crumbs

from the pocket of the coat and tossed them with some effort across the water toward a pair of graceful swans.

"Hello," Sharder said, slipping onto the bench beside the man, carefully keeping his voice so low that it would not carry to the nearby girl splashing her feet.

The man in the black coat said nothing. Instead, he tossed a few more crumbs to the swans.

Sharder tried again. "Nice birds," he said.

This time the man acknowledged his presence.

"They're beautiful birds," he corrected. "I feed them every day."

Sharder slid a little closer on the bench.

"I think you can help me," he whispered.

The man squinted toward the noonday sun, revealing an aging face lined with illness and something more. "Really?"

"I want to make a purchase."

"Who sent you to me?"

"I don't know his name. The bartender at Charlie's. He said you fed the swans here, and that you could solve my problem."

"What do you need?" the man asked, reassured. "Morphine? Marijuana?"

"More than that," Sharder managed to reply.

"Heroin? Opium? Hashish?"

"No."

"Perhaps LSD or mescaline. They're quite popular these days."

"The bartender said you dealt in poisons."

"I deal in many things. Medicines to start life and to end it. And to enjoy it along the way."

"This person — she's had one heart attack already. If there was something painless—"

"Death is never without pain," the man in black answered sharply. "But I have something."

Sharder sighed. "Thank God!"

"He is hardly the one to thank under the circumstances. What medication does she take now?"

Sharder took the tiny pink and white capsule from his pocket.

"These sleeping pills. And some heart medicine too."

The old head nodded. "This will do nicely. Be here tomorrow at the same time. It will cost you five hundred dollars. Half in advance, the remainder when the results have been obtained."

"Isn't that high?"

"Results are guaranteed. Results without a trace."

"All right," Sharder said after a moment. "I'll be here tomorrow."

As Sharder let himself into the apartment, his wife called from the bedroom. "David, is that you?"

"Yes, dear. How do you feel?"

"Better. I've been taking it easy."

He went into the cluttered bedroom and smiled down at the middle-aged woman in the big double bed. "I hope so. You know what the doctor said. One more heart attack might be your last."

"I'm sure you'd manage without me. Probably go out and marry one of those cute young secretaries down at the office. And live happily ever after on my money."

"That's foolishness." But as he stared down at the woman in the bed, he wondered what had happened to him, to them. What had happened to turn love into hate.

The following day was gloomy with a hint of rain, and when Sharder reached the pond in the park he saw that it was deserted except for the man and his swans.

The man glanced up briefly as Sharder seated himself, then shifted

his gaze once more to the mirror surface of the water where the swans fed.

"Do you have it?" Sharder whispered.

"I have it."

Sharder passed him an envelope. "Two hundred and fifty now, the rest later. Right?"

"Quite correct." The old man gave a rasping cough, then passed over a tiny gray envelope in return.

Sharder looked inside at the familiar pink and white capsule. "What's in it?"

"You needn't know."

"What if there's an autopsy?"

"There will be no trace. It will look like a heart attack."

"You should be a doctor."

The man in black tried to chuckle, but it came out a cough. "I can prescribe for everyone but myself."

Sharder got to his feet, sliding the envelope carefully into his pocket. "How are the swans today?"

The old man gazed bleakly across the water. "Like me. Not good."

"You should try some of your own medicine," Sharder said, thinking of the narcotics.

"Perhaps I will."

There were fourteen capsules remaining in the tinted bottle. Sharder knew she took one every night, so that left just enough for two weeks. Carefully he removed one, just in case she'd been counting, and flushed it down the toilet. Then he substituted the capsule he'd bought in the park and shook the bottle a bit,

mixing them. Not tonight, but some night during the next two weeks—

Some night. Even he wouldn't know which one.

Eight days later, she was still alive, more irritable and demanding than ever. He stared at the familiar bottle, counting for the hundredth time the few remaining capsules. Six. Just six more.

"David, bring me my sleeping pill."

"Sure." He took her the bottle and waited while she shook one into her sweating palm.

"I haven't been good today," she confided. "Perhaps some sleep will help me."

"I hope so."

She downed a capsule with a gulp of water. "But you won't have long to wait for my money. I know you—" She gasped suddenly, and dropped the glass. "David!"

"What is it?"

She toppled backward onto the bed, clutching at her chest, her feet sliding across the fuzzy white rug he'd always hated. "David, call the—"

He waited a moment, standing over her sprawled body, until he was certain that all life was gone. Then he picked up the bottle of capsules and returned it to the medicine cabinet. After another five minutes, he went to the telephone and called her doctor.

THE DETECTIVE was a grim-faced man ten-years younger than Sharder

"I don't mind telling you we're not satisfied," he said. "There'll have to be an autopsy."

"What do you mean?"

"Her sister says she feared for her life."

"That's nonsense!"

"Maybe. I'll tell you after the autopsy."

Sharder remembered what the man in black—the poison man—had promised. No trace.

"Go ahead," he told the detective. "I have nothing to hide."

Three days later, after the funeral, the detective came to his apartment once more.

"Sorry to have caused you any discomfort," he said, suddenly affable. "The autopsy report showed nothing unusual. Only standard medication in her stomach."

"I'm glad you're finally convinced it was a heart attack."

"I'm convinced. We were just doing our job, Mr. Sharder."

He watched the detective go down the hallway to the elevator, then went into the kitchen and poured himself a stiff shot of straight gin. At last she was in her grave, and no one in the whole world knew the truth.

Except the old man in the park.

He hadn't really thought about the man since that first day after her death. Now he remembered that the final payment had yet to be made. Another two hundred and fifty dollars.

Sharder drove to the park by a

roundabout route, in the event the detective might still be watching him. There were people now, and the day had the warmth of spring about it. But he realized at once that something was missing. He saw a workman clearing dead branches from the end of the pond and went over to him.

"What happened to the swans?" he asked casually.

The man glanced up at Sharder. "Don't you read the papers? Some guy fed them poison and then took a dose of it himself."

"What? Who was he?"

"Guy who used to come every day and feed them. Always wore a black overcoat, winter or summer. Sat on that bench right over there. Cops told me he was a narcotics pusher. He was dying of something, I guess, so he killed himself and took the swans with him. A real nut!"

"I guess so."

Sharder walked away slowly. He realized as he drove back to the apartment that now the final witness to his crime was dead. This nameless man who had dispensed the stuff of dreams from a damp park bench was gone with his swans, and Sharder had nothing to fear.

Preparing for bed, alone and truly at peace for the first time, Sharder knew it had been worth the terrible deed. She had been only an incident in his life, and now that she was gone he could begin to live again. There were other women, young

women, and with money nothing was impossible.

But as he lay awake between the cool sheets he remembered the face of the bartender who'd first suggested the man in the park. Would the bartender remember him? No, he didn't even know Sharder's name. That was safe.

After ten more minutes, Sharder sighed and got out of bed. He went into the bathroom and took one of the five remaining sleeping capsules, washing it down with a glass of water. As he climbed into bed a second time he wondered how long it would take the capsule to dissolve in his stomach and start to work.

He froze, one leg still outside the covers.

Capsule!

The man's poison, no matter how effective, could never have struck his wife as instantly as it did, immediately after she'd swallowed it. At the very least, the capsule walls would take a moment or two to dis-

solve in her stomach. The gelatin would have held back the poison for that long.

But if the poison hadn't killed her, what had?

He was sweating now, remembering the results of the autopsy. It really had been a heart attack, a natural death. The detective had mentioned normal medication in her stomach, and of course he'd meant the sleeping compound.

Of course.

And the man's poison capsule, unused, had remained among the five in the bottle. The five from which he had just chosen one.

Knowing it, realizing it now, Sharder wasn't really surprised when he felt the muscles of his heart begin to tighten. Even with the odds four to one in his favor, he'd chosen the wrong capsule. The poison capsule. And he knew he needed help.

He was out of bed and halfway to the telephone when the final wrenching pain cut through to his heart.



ANOTHER EDWARD D. HOCH STORY COMING SOON

WILLING VICTIM

No man living could do the thing I had promised. The man smiled and I knew, too late. No man living. But...

by

MORRIS

HERSHMAN



CHARL PECK said easily, "This is for you," giving his waiter the last bill in his wallet.

Peck coughed politely a couple of minutes after that functionary was gone. The man at the next table in this restaurant, a hard looking fellow in the mid fifties, glanced up from a copy of *Inventor's News*.

He was dressed as expensively as Peck, but his clothes weren't nearly as loud, Peck noticed.

"I seem to have spent my last five dollars just now," Peck smiled. "Could you lend me enough to pay my bill?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"If you lend me ten and walk to my cottage with me, I'll give you ten dollars back." He shrugged in the silence that followed. "I can give you twenty, if you'd rather. The amount makes no real difference to me."

He wasn't surprised to see quick interest lighting the older man's face. Rich people, as Carl Peck had found out during ten years or so of making deals with them, will do almost anything at all for a few extra dollars.

"Well, I heard the waiter call you by name, so you're obviously registered as a guest," the older man said, brushing a hand at the dust motes that gleamed and whirled in the sun's rays across the length of his table. The hard face didn't change as he nodded. "I'll be glad to accommodate you, sir. Your interest rates are excellent."

Peck began walking a step or two ahead of the older man down the tree-shaded path to his rented cottage close to the year-round luxury hotel; but the older man caught up and kept to Peck's pace without making any complaint.

"I was a little startled when you said that thing about interest rates just before," Carl Peck told him in a thoughtful tone of voice. "I hadn't remembered about interest rates in years."

"Apparently not," the older man agreed, rolling his copy of *Inventor's News* into a horn and swatting a fly with it. "If you were an inventor, though, you'd have to—"

"But I am," Peck said quickly, grateful because the point had been brought up by the hard-faced older man. Then he did his best to look confused. "That is, I—well, I did

invent something once, but frankly I'd rather not talk about it."

"Suit yourself. I can be close-mouthed, too."

"Money," Peck said lazily, as if being close-mouthed about a certain subject was exactly what he wanted, "doesn't have to worry anybody who's really far-sighted."

"All the same, you're the one who was embarrassed at table," the older man said crisply. "I have some respect for money, thank heavens, and that sort of thing doesn't happen to me."

"I don't have any respect for it," Peck said, more and more grateful that the talk was going like he wanted it to. "Manufacturing it is a mechanical process that needs plates and inks and paper. If there was a way to erase the inking on a one dollar bill and then produce a ten or a twenty or a fifty with it, we'd all be rich. It's a matter of inks, when you come right down to it. Your wealth is ruled by the ink on your bills."

"Money would become worthless if everybody had access to a mechanical process like that." Thoughtfully the older man added, "The process would be useful in the hands of one or two people, but those people would be rich. Not like you or me, I mean, but really rich."

Carl Peck managed to keep from smiling. Never in a long career had he run across a single wealthy man who admitted directly or otherwise to being in excellent-shape, finan-

cially. Every one of them thought of himself as being reasonably well off or comfortably fixed, but not rich. Never rich. And it was amazing, when you came to think of it, how often a wealthy man could positively drool at the notion of earning some more money.

"People with any such invention," the older man said realistically, "would have to keep quiet about it."

"Maybe so," Peck nodded, "but they'd be less than human if they could resist the temptation to brag about it occasionally."

"Then they'd better be less than human or face ruin."

"I don't think an occasional brag will—oh, here we are. My little hack."

It was one of the most expensive cottage accommodations that the hotel offered. The older man, who was staying in a smaller room that was part of the huge building they had come from, looked at Carl Peck as if he had never before come across such a spendthrift.

"How much money did I promise you?" Carl Peck asked negligently. "Twenty dollars, wasn't it?"

"Fifty," the older man said promptly.

"All right. I'll have to ask you to wait outside while I get the money. I'll try not to take very long."

Peck slipped into the cottage before the older man could start to protest. He locked the door noisily,

then closed and locked every window before shuttering it.

From one of the locked drawers he pulled out a thick roll of bills and a heating pad. He plugged the cord from the heating pad into an electrical outlet, then took a fifty dollar bill from the roll of bills and held it against the pad. While it was simmering gently, Peck reached down for a bottle of green ink. He allowed a drop of it to reach his left forefinger and smudged part of the fifty dollar bill with it.

It would take another minute for the bill to warm up sufficiently, he judged, and in that time he glanced at the locked drawer which held what he sometimes thought of, with a chuckle, as the infernal machine. Many a time he had "demonstrated" it by putting a bill into the top of it and seemingly taking out the same bill without a mark on it, then putting it into the upper half of the machine and apparently cranking it out as a ten or twenty or fifty dollar bill.

Carl Peck was never surprised that so many suckers believed such a crude confidence game. With wonders on every side nowadays, suckers had become more gullible than ever. And the rich ones were more gullible than any others in this technological civilization that had turned into a con man's paradise.

At this very minute there was a sucker, a genuine fourteen-carat pigeon, waiting for him in front of his door.

Quickly now, Peck disconnected the heating pad and put it away. When he opened the door a few inches and stood firmly against it as if to block any view inside, he saw that the older man, the pigeon, was standing less than six inches away.

Carl Peck offered the bill and said, "Here you are, Mr.—uh, I don't even know your name, come to think of it."

"Henry Sebastian," the older man said, wincing as he touched the heated bill and looking wide-eyed at the smudge of green ink. He gaped at Peck.

"My name is Carl Peck," Peck said, taking a step backwards. "P-e-c-k. I'll see you around, I'm sure, Mr. Sebastian."

Sure enough, the pigeon phoned him next morning.

"You've found a money-making process and not even a bank can tell the difference," Mr. Sebastian started, almost incoherent with excitement. "I'll buy it for—well, it makes no sense to offer cash, but perhaps you'd be interested in negotiable securities, Mr. Peck. Does anybody else know about this?"

"Nobody does, but I'm not sure I want to sell," Peck said very slowly.

"But you admit I'm right, you admit it. I'm coming over to see you right now, and I promise it'll be well worthwhile."

But this visit didn't turn out to be worth Carl Peck's while. Not at all.

Carl Peck, in fact, never knew what hit him when he opened the door to Mr. Sebastian, and he never regained consciousness.

Mr. Henry Sebastian stepped away from the body, pocketing a certain tool which he had invented years ago and which wouldn't be detected as having caused anything but heart failure. That tool was the first of the two workable inventions he had ever made, and he disliked using it for this.

He forced two bureau drawers open, and then the curious looking black box was in sight. With the special implement he was carrying, Mr. Sebastian, of all people, promptly destroyed the money-producing machine.

When he was finished he glanced at Peck's body and said, "Damn fool for talking so much." He sighed "Tell the truth to one person and it'll be told to others, inevitably—and in time nobody will be safe. No one. No one at all." Mr. Sebastian shrugged his shoulders.

His morning's work had played hob with the expensive suit he was wearing, Mr. Sebastian noticed regretfully. It was a shame, but if necessary he could always go back to his city residence for awhile and crank out enough money for another suit.

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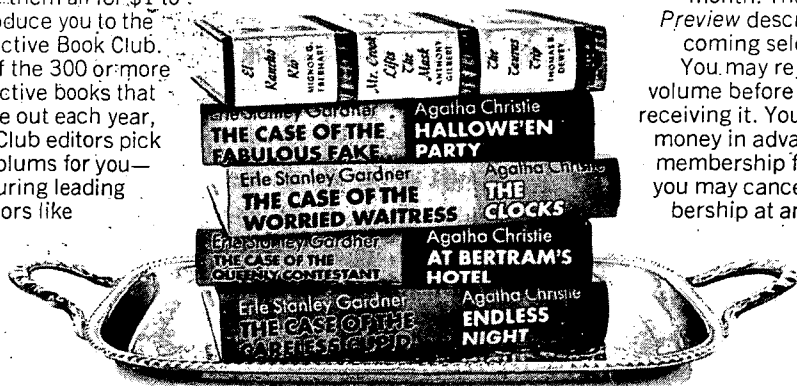
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